



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 29 May 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 29 May 2024

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Notice given.

Petitions

Belgrave-Gembrook Road, Selby, pedestrian safety

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) presented a petition bearing 155 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the risk of a fatality to a school child or other pedestrian, on a section of the Belgrave-Gembrook Rd in Selby, Victoria, at and near the Selby Primary School school crossing. There have been multiple car accidents over the years in which motorists have lost control of their vehicles and spun, slid or rolled across the pedestrian footpath and often also into residential properties. Many local residents consider this section high risk to pedestrians and some do not allow their children to walk to or from the Selby Primary School along this route, due to this risk. Most recently, a vehicle lost control at 3pm on a weekday, spun, crossed the footpath and knocked over a Vicroads installed wire fence and hit a tree, just as the school crossing supervisor was setting up for children using the crossing at 3.30pm. Previous school crossing supervisor quit her job at this location as she felt it was so dangerous. After a previous campaign 8–9 years ago, flashing school zone signs were installed but have not stopped people speeding with high risk of pedestrian fatality.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to engage VicRoads to assess this section of road and install further safety measures as a matter of urgency, before a serious injury or fatality of a school child or other pedestrian occurs. This could include armco railing between edge of road and footpath, more prominent signage which flashes 24/7 not just at school times, speed cameras, traffic calming measures, and speed humps/traffic islands.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Guardianship and Decision-making for Vulnerable Adults – Ordered to be published

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 36.

Joint sitting of Parliament

Senate vacancy

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to meet with the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of sitting and voting together to choose a person to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the death of Senator Linda White as proposed by the Assembly.

*Bills***Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024****State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 and the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024.

*Motions***Ministerial conduct**

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Premier to require her ministers to deal with community representations in a timely manner, noting that certain ministers take up to a year to respond. It does not matter how small an issue may seem; every Victorian deserves to have their issue addressed in a timely manner.

Leave refused.

Member conduct

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house expresses concern that the disgraced members for Ringwood and South Barwon are misusing standing order 26 in taking indefinite leave from Parliament to avoid scrutiny, which leaves their communities unrepresented.

Leave refused.

Middle East conflict

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house reconsider its decision to stand with Israel considering the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the ICC prosecutor's request for warrants to arrest the Israeli PM and defence minister.

Leave refused.

*Members statements***Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:37): It has now been over eight months since the Labor government announced Victoria Elliott as the new commissioner of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. In these past eight months we have heard next to nothing from IBAC about its investigations into serious corruption in this state. Under its new Labor-appointed commissioner IBAC appears to have taken a vow of silence. That might suit the political interests of a tired and dodgy Labor government, but it is not in the public interest. Corruption flourishes not only in darkness but also in silence. It is a matter of public record that IBAC was investigating serious corruption allegations concerning the relationship between the Labor government and the United Firefighters Union, known as Operation Richmond. Where does Operation Richmond stand? Nobody seems to know, because IBAC is silent. The most recent state budget increased the fire services property levy by over \$600 million. Victorian families forced to pay these higher taxes deserve to know if their money is being wasted or worse by the Labor government and their mates in the UFU. I call on IBAC Commissioner Elliott to finalise Operation Richmond or at least assure Victorians it is still being actively pursued and not swept under the carpet, as the Labor government and the UFU so desperately want to occur.

Mill Park electorate community groups

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:39): I rise today to speak about some of the wonderful community groups I have met with recently across the Mill Park electorate. It was wonderful to visit the Greek Orthodox Community of Whittlesea seniors group ahead of Orthodox Easter to wish them a καλό Πάσχα while sharing traditional Greek fasting biscuits. Thanks to the committee and their members for the work they do in our community and for their warm hospitality.

I was also very fortunate to visit the Golden Sun Disabled and Senior Citizens Association and the Beranci Macedonian club and join them in their celebrations of Orthodox Easter. Христос воскресна. The celebrations were marked with Macedonian music and dancing, and I had a lot of fun joining in with them.

I was also honoured to be invited to the Whittlesea Maltese Citizens Seniors Club for their annual Mother's Day event this year in collaboration with the Lalor bocce club. The event was a beautiful celebration of Mother's Day, and with more than 280 people in attendance it was a great success for the clubs.

And as always it was a pleasure to visit the Whittlesea Chinese Association for a 'Meet the MP' session, answering questions from members about many issues. Members were particularly interested in finding out more about the Victorian energy upgrades discount program, including information about cheaper heat pump water-heating systems, interest-free battery loans and discounts available on replacing their existing gas heaters. President Albert Yew and the association's committee surprised me by gifting me a photo printed on a wooden block from the very first WCA annual general meeting in 2006, when I was there alongside others for the community, and I thank the community for the very sentimental gift.

Australian Hotels Association awards

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:40): It was a massive night for Gippsland pubs at the Australian Hotels Association Victorian awards for excellence last week. Gippsland South did particularly well, with the Middle pub in Korumburra being named best regional pub and best regional outdoor experience. The Middle also won the highly sought after Parma of the Year award, and I am told they have sold 653 parmas in the six days since. Well done to Fish and Elyse Fisher and all their team for being a great hospitality venue but also a pub that strongly supports its local community. Sale's Star Hotel doubled up, racking up back-to-back wins in the statewide People's Choice Award – a stunning achievement for Jeremy and Tori Green and their team. Fiona Cox and Ben Hall from the Poowong Hotel also scored a win, named best regional pub bar – a great achievement for a small pub that is the heart of its community. The recently reopened Welshpool Hotel won an award for top supporting pub for the Good Friday Appeal fundraising, while the Woodside Beach Hotel, also not long reopened, was a finalist in the Gippsland pub of the year awards. A number of other Gippsland pubs also won awards, confirming what we all know: Gippsland is not only the best part of the state but also our best hospitality location.

Fish Creek Tea Cosy Festival

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:41): Gippsland has the best festivals, not least the amazing Fish Creek Tea Cosy Festival, which was held again last week. Congrats to Marge Arnup and their amazing team of volunteers, who put on this quirky but delightful event. It was amazing to help local legend Nadia Stefani open the festival and then go inside and see a tea cosy version of Nadia on display too.

Eltham North Primary School

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (09:42): Congratulations to Eltham North Primary School on their celebration of a centenary of learning and fun. And what a celebration it was, with a beautiful smoking ceremony and the preps, grade 1s and 2s and school choir treating us to their lovely voices, including an updated rendition of *Seven Schools in One*, telling the unique history of the school. Eltham North Primary School has seven different settings, with the first school located in Lower Glen Park Road, now known as Lower Road. There were 37 children enrolled. The current site opened in July 1979 with local MP Pauline Toner officially opening the school on 30 November that year. Congratulations to everyone connected with the primary school – students, teachers, staff, parents and helpers. Eltham North Primary is a beautiful school with a wonderful community focused on kindness, respect and learning.

National Volunteer Week

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (09:42): National Volunteer Week is an opportunity to acknowledge the many volunteers making our communities such great places to live. On Wear Orange Wednesday I hosted a thankyou barbecue for our local CFA, Nillumbik SES, acknowledging their important volunteer work helping to keep our community safe night and day. Thank you to everyone for their volunteer efforts; we loved being able to thank you.

The SES are there for us rain, hail or shine, tirelessly working to serve the community, doing late night call-outs, rescues and training. Our CFA are always there when needed. Nillumbik SES recently helped rescue a seriously injured 15-year-old boy from Plenty Gorge. The SES responded in minutes to assist the rescue in response to the steep incline, securing him onto a stretcher and to the waiting ambulance 500 metres away. This story is just one of the many highlights of the amazing efforts of these volunteers to step in and make a critical difference. We have a wonderful community that shares a spirit of dedication and altruism without want for recognition or payment. On behalf of our community I thank all of them for their service.

Doncaster Baseball Club

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:43): Last week I was very pleased to attend the opening of the Deep Creek Reserve pavilion, which is the home of the Doncaster Dragons baseball club. The baseball club is a fabulous local institution. They needed a new upgrade of the facilities, particularly as they have got a growing amount of players that are women and young girls, and the new pavilion is looking fantastic. It is right near Andersons Creek, where in 1851 Louis John Michel found gold in Victoria for the first time. The baseball club borders that, which is apt because it cost \$3 million to build but the state government could hardly put any money in because they are broke. Now we look at the papers this morning and find that, not content with putting more debt on the credit card than any Treasurer in Australian state political history, Tim Pallas is going to rack up another \$12 billion. Where does the credit card end? Twelve billion dollars more. No Geelong fast rail, goodbye airport rail, goodbye western rail – cannot afford it, cannot do it. He has got to beg overseas like a scrounger all he can because he is out of money. This is what happens when you cannot manage money. Paraguay, Nicaragua, Belarus, Victoria – that is what we are becoming under the Labor Party.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members to call members by their correct titles.

Andrea Federico

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (09:45): I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Andrea Federico, the principal of University Park Primary School, who is retiring in June this year. Andrea has been teaching since 1985 and the principal of University Park Primary School since 2012. I have had the honour to work in partnership with Andrea during the school's major upgrades, including the \$7.4 million for the school's recent rebuild and other projects including \$670,000 to redevelop the gym hall and of course

the \$500,000 for other rebuilds. For over three decades Andrea has shaped the future of countless students, teachers and our community. We are so grateful, and she will be missed. I wish all the very best to you and your family, Andrea.

St Albans electorate teachers

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (09:46): On another note, congratulations on 45 years of service to Janice Myszkowski from Albion North Primary School; Joanne Richmond, the principal of St Albans Primary School; and finally a big congratulations on 55 years of service to Ray Lawicki from Victoria University Secondary College. Ray has devoted all 55 years of knowledge to Vic Uni College from back when it was known as St Albans Technical School. I thank you all for your dedication and service to our students and of course our local communities. You have all been an integral part of shaping the future of our next generation. Thank you again for your service.

Commercial Hotel, Woods Point

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:46): And the winner of the best bush pub in Victoria is the Commercial Hotel, Woods Point. Enormous accolades to this great little pub in the High Country for taking out this award at the Australian Hotels Association Victorian awards night. Congratulations to owners Luke and Carley Burdon and all the staff. This award is recognition of all your hard work, dedication and perseverance. It is not always easy, and COVID certainly threw a big spanner in the mix, but you have kept going. This iconic hotel has been a local watering hole and popular destination for visitors to the area since 1886. It has burnt down a couple of times, the last time during the devastating fires in 1939. For locals the pub is a focal point and meeting place. The hotel is pretty versatile and can host a jam and scones morning tea as well as hearty meals.

Woods Point is remote by Victorian standards, and the pub relies heavily on bush users. Hunters and fishermen are frequent visitors, with people from all over the state coming to the area for four-wheel driving, horseriding and mountain bike riding. Turning our forests into national parks and locking up the bush would have a significant detrimental effect for those in the town. With the closure of the timber industry, those living and working in the High Country can ill afford another blow.

Woods Point Gun Club

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:47): A shout-out too to the Woods Point Gun Club up the road for their warm and welcoming environment and great lunches. The club impressively draws its strong membership – which includes an Olympic gold medallist, Catherine Skinner – from a wide area, which is testament to the club itself. I look forward to my next visit.

Springvale Italian Senior Citizens Club

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (09:48): As we approach Italy's national day, the Festa della Repubblica, this Sunday, I rise to thank the Springvale Italian Senior Citizens Club and the broader Italian diaspora for their contributions to my community. The Italian community has long been significant in the Mulgrave electorate, with over 3000 people of Italian ancestry still calling my electorate home. The Springvale Italian Senior Citizens Club is a cornerstone of this community and has been active for 43 years, with almost 200 members, demonstrating its enduring importance. The club provides friendship and support and promotes wonderful activities for the elderly.

Celebrating Italian Cultural Day recently with the members was a great honour, highlighting their vibrant social life and cultural sharing along with some fabulous music and dancing. Under the leadership of president Biagio Di Blasio and his dedicated committee, including his wife Rita, Teresa Rechichi, Joe Rechichi OAM and Frank Orlando, the wonderful club members meet every Wednesday for social activities and fundraisers for causes like children's cancer research and the Springvale Benevolent Society. I proudly welcome those from the club in the gallery today. To the

Springvale Italian Senior Citizens Club and all Italians in my electorate, I extend my heartfelt thanks and wish you a wonderful Festa della Repubblica celebration this weekend.

Housing

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:49): When you consider the growing public housing waiting list in this state, those who are residents of public housing are indeed fortunate, and being afforded a public housing residence should be respected. However, more must be done by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to ensure those afforded a home are respectful of the opportunity.

Here is just one example. A clandestine drug lab was shut down when Victoria Police recently executed a long-awaited raid at an East Gippsland public housing dwelling. However, despite this, leading up to this action there were 140 separate reports over four years to the department raising concerns about this illegal activity. My office also made multiple representations to the various ministers. However, the department said they could find nothing to substantiate these claims and appeared to have an attitude of defending the indefensible. After the raid the department retired the property and sold it at auction; it needed to be gutted and sold due to methamphetamine contamination. Questions continue as to how tenants were allowed to create a drug lab in public housing when the department was continually made aware of the issue and did not act.

I call on the minister to review the policy and ensure more comprehensive monitoring is undertaken and more consideration is given to complaints from law-abiding residents and to make sure that those who are in public housing are those that need a roof over their head and will be respectful.

National Volunteer Week

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:51): Last week was volunteer week, and it was an absolute delight to get out across the electorate to thank our volunteers, because we could not do it without them. A shout-out to the Little Cupcake in Ballarat, who made over 500 beautiful cupcakes. My first stop was Ballan CFA, and I was really pleased to thank them for the life-saving work that they do. That was quickly followed by a visit to training night at the Bacchus Marsh SES. What a strong and vibrant volunteer group they are. Did you know that the SES is the largest vehicle rescue organisation in the state? A highlight was visiting the Leigh group. This is a CFA group that covers Rokewood and Dereel, and it was a very special opportunity to thank them for their work during the Beaufort fires and of course closer to home in Dereel. The local Dereel community sent a card to all the brigades that attended, and it was so heartwarming to see the impact that a simple thankyou can have on our volunteers. Ballarat Foundation does an amazing job in coordinating volunteer organisations, and their morning tea at Barkly Square was a chance to catch up with so many, from people helping disadvantaged kids to drive through L2P right through to the Salvos. You do a power of work in our community. But we are not stopping just because the week has ended. I cannot wait to catch up with Meredith and Buninyong CFAs and the Pentland group in coming weeks, because I want to say a big, big thankyou to all of our volunteers.

Rowville electorate schools

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:52): I rise to condemn the government and their 10th budget. Once again residents in my electorate of Rowville have been neglected by the Premier and her Labor government. The schools in the Rowville electorate are in just desperate need of funding, both Rowville and Scoresby Secondary – amazing schools that through no fault of their own need urgent upgrades. But it is not just Scoresby and Rowville Secondary that need support, it is all the schools in my electorate that this government needs to support. Heany Park, Karoo, Lysterfield, Park Ridge, St Simon's, Rowville Primary School, Scoresby Primary School and Carrington have all been shafted by this government. The \$10 million election promise for Carrington Primary School once again has been cut in this budget by the government. Labor cannot manage money, and our schools are paying the price of Labor's debt. Labor's \$25 million interest payment per day would easily fund upgrades to

schools in the Rowville electorate. I hope that the Labor government will take note and actually support government schools in the Rowville electorate.

McKinnon Secondary College

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (09:53): It was a real pleasure recently to be at McKinnon Secondary College and to see the year 12 VCE theatre studies production of *The Conference of Birds*. It was an entirely student-led production. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I do want to acknowledge the students involved – Michaela Anderson, Vasya Argyris, Riley Beaumont-Weir, Charlotte Dwyer, Milana Gavrilenko, Anthony Kostelac, Yasmeen Kotliarski, Sofija Lukac, Le Quan Nguyen, Ella Ruze, Edouard Swider-Figueroa, Myra Tan and Laura Villena-Gento. As I said, I entirely enjoyed it. It was entirely student-led. The students did a great job with it.

I also, while I am on my feet, want to thank the Premier for her recent visit to McKinnon Secondary College. McKinnon is an outstanding government school in my electorate, a highly sought-after school and these days a very big school – it has got around 2800 students. I am proud of all the work that our government has done at McKinnon Secondary College, building the senior centre, which was recently named after the esteemed former principal Pitsa Binnion – and we got to show the Premier the senior centre – but I think, more importantly, building that second campus, which has really set McKinnon up for the future. Again, congratulations to the students.

Youth crime prevention

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:55): Labor's latest budget cuts \$1.8 million from Victoria's Youth Support and Advocacy Service for their program to keep kids out of prison. That money funded 11 workers to provide early intervention support for 330 at-risk youth. Prison hurts kids. These programs and workers help kids, and yet Labor has cut them. A mum recently told the ABC that if her kid's support worker Tracy had not come into his life when she did, he would probably be in Parkville – that is the youth detention centre – right now. But next month Tracy and 10 of her colleagues will be out of a job, and 330 at-risk kids will lose that safety net.

Labor says they cannot afford the \$1.8 million to keep these kids out of prison, but they can afford \$34 million to shackle kids with ankle monitors and a lifetime of stigma. Labor says this budget was tight and cuts had to be made, but they happened to find an 8 per cent increase in the budget for Victoria Police, not to mention the billions for new prisons. This comes off the back of the Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations, including important recommendations about how to keep First Nations kids out of the criminal justice system. Yet how many of those recommendations has the Labor state government accepted? Just four out of 48 – less than 10 per cent. Labor must turn this around. Instead of more prisons and police, we need more programs to keep kids out of prison. And how much would reinstating the funding cost? Two, maybe three, ankle bracelets.

Footscray Community Arts

Katie HALL (Footscray) (09:56): Footscray Community Arts is arguably the creative and cultural heart of Footscray in my electorate – an independent arts precinct that fosters creativity within my diverse community. This year Footscray Community Arts celebrates its 50th birthday, so it is timely that I pay tribute to this amazing organisation's 50 years of strong support and development of contemporary arts in Melbourne's west.

Footscray Community Arts started in a tin shed in 1974, in what is now Victoria University, when founders George Seelaf and Peter Green from the mighty meatworkers union envisioned a thriving arts hub to provide greater access and equity to the arts locally. George campaigned to save the nearby historic Henderson House, which became the lasting home of Footscray Community Arts, conserving the past and setting the scene for a vibrant new future. I am proud to have played a part with the Allan Labor government in that future too, securing \$8.7 million for the Footscray Community Arts' outdoor amphitheatre and creating a new venue for the inner west, with even more high-quality cultural experiences coming – hopefully for the next 50 years and beyond. Congratulations to the current co-

CEOs Bec Cole and Daniel Santangeli and their team, who are overseeing this exciting next phase and 50th anniversary year. Happy birthday, Footscray Community Arts.

Mildura electorate events

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:58): A couple of weeks ago the Mildura Field Days were held over two days of glorious weather, and what a wonderful event it was. We also had the pleasure of hosting Brooke Warne through the Shane Warne Legacy. Brooke Warne is Shane Warne's daughter, and the Shane Warne Legacy was onsite doing heart health checks for anyone that was in attendance. I did manage to have my heart checked, and it was perfect, actually. I got an A-plus, the first time I have ever had an A-plus in my life. An A-plus for the event as well; it gets bigger every year.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, they did find a heart. The weather was magnificent. There was something for every single member of the family and a great display of the booming agricultural industry in Sunraysia. Also last week I had a visit from the Minister for Agriculture to visit Australia's food bowl, which was magnificent. We spent the day visiting Sunbeam and also the Mildura Fruit Company, and the citrus season is ramping up now. We also had the opening of the Mildura Sporting Precinct. Speaking of which, it is Big Freeze at the P this coming Saturday. I will be taking the plunge into 30 bags of ice to fight MND. Mia Collicot has done a magnificent job organising this event. There is going to be a silent auction, and 15 community members, including me, will be sliding into the ice.

Waste and recycling management

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:59): Today I rise to speak on an incredibly important local issue that is impacting the community of Lara. Prospect Hill International's proposed waste-to-energy facility in Lara is extremely concerning for residents in my electorate and the wider Geelong community. The proposed facility is designed to process 400,000 tonnes of waste per year, and since 2020 my community has been fighting against this project. Along with hundreds of written objections, community members have attended forums and organised rallies, and thousands have signed a petition objecting to this project. The community is concerned about many aspects of this project, particularly the safety issues it raises, the proximity of the proposed plant to local households and the effects it will have on air quality and noise pollution. It is important to note that the closest home is only 350 metres away from this project. The centre of the township of Lara is just 1.2 kilometres away, and there are thousands of homes in the suburbs of Lara and Corio, some within 1.5 kilometres of the site. Hundreds of local residents have raised concerns with me through emails and phone calls to my office and in conversations that I have had. I would like to acknowledge the community members, including Charles Street, Les Dew, Annie Duncan, Melanie Szocs and many others, who are working tirelessly to advocate against this proposal and advocate for their community, and I am proud to stand with them. The Committee for Geelong has resolved not to support this project, and the City of Greater Geelong have publicly stated that they are not supportive of this project and would not use this facility for council waste.

Gendered violence

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:01): It is a real privilege to be appointed the Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change. We have embarked on a significant journey as Victorians in ending gender-based violence. We had the Royal Commission into Family Violence – some 227 recommendations and \$4 billion invested. We have seen a scaling up of services that are supporting our community and keeping women and children safe, but we know that the cultural change and that journey that we need to be on is going to be the hardest work that needs to be done. That is why the Premier's announcement of this portfolio area and the work that has been done with the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, the Minister for Women and the Attorney-General is so very critical, because we know that those attitudes and those gender-based stereotypes and norms have huge impacts on the outcomes and wellbeing of women and children in our community. It starts with

all of us coming together, boys and men, having positive role models and positive masculinity in our community and having those conversations. To be on that journey and to be doing that work and having in each and every one of our communities that accountability is really important. To everyone in the Parliament and in our community, I am really looking forward to working with you in understanding how we can change those behaviours, have a better outcome for young boys and men and keep women and children safe. I must say that accountability in every frame starts with men, starts with boys and the accountability of perpetrators. That is the shared journey that we are on in the community together.

Hut Gallery

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:03): It was fantastic to attend the 80th birthday of the Hut Gallery in Ferntree Gully recently. Happy 80 years. Can I thank all the wonderful volunteers there. Shirley Dougan does an incredible job. I always love coming in and seeing Shirley. She always calls me ‘dude’ and ‘man’. It always gives me the boost I need for my day. She is a wonderful human, as are all the volunteers there. I note back in the 1940s, when they first started, they bought the hut for about £130-odd. Money went a lot further back then. So happy 80 years, and thank you again to all the volunteers.

Bayswater electorate emergency services

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:03): It was also great to catch up with Inspector Pam Hawker and Senior Sergeant Ben Oakley recently from Knox and Boronia police stations to talk about the fantastic work that our police officers are doing in keeping our community safe. As a former police officer myself, I know the hard work that all of the frontline officers do each and every day to keep our communities safe. I want to thank them for taking the time to meet with me and talking to me about how I can help them in my role in government to support the fantastic work they are doing on the front line. Thank you again to everyone at our police stations and our frontline emergency services workers for their fantastic work in keeping us all safe and looked after.

North East Link

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:04): I would like to give a quick shout-out to Victoria’s biggest roads project in history, the North East Link. I drove in this morning on the Eastern Freeway; works are well and truly underway. We are adding 45 kilometres of new lanes and new twin tunnels, which will finally complete the missing link, creating the ring road. It is all happening, delivered by the Allan Labor government.

James Cook Primary School

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:04): It was great to welcome the Deputy Premier to Narre Warren North last week to James Cook Primary School in Endeavour Hills, where we met with principal Anne Burgess and her amazing team. We were able to view the plans and discuss the building project thanks to the Allan Labor government’s commitment of \$9.1 million. This upgrade will go a long way to delivering a better education facility for the community at James Cook Primary, and I cannot wait to watch the project unfold.

Endeavour Hills Judo Club

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:05): I want to talk today about the Endeavour Hills Judo Club and the amazing and incredible Janet Lambert, who has been running the club for over 50 years. The club has done incredible work teaching the practice of judo for people of all ages, and it was great to see them in action. They did actually flip me on my back, and I also did that to another participant, which was a lot of fun. Thank you for the warm welcome and teaching me their amazing practice.

Endeavour Hills Senior Football Club

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:05): On the weekend I also headed down to see Rex, Fran and Gail and the team at Endeavour Hills Falcons to watch the clash against the Doveton team. The Falcons did win the flag last year; they have gone up a division. Unfortunately, they did not come home with the chocolates but provided an entertaining game, and I wish them well for the rest of the season. Next weekend I am excited to see the epic clash of the suburbs, Narre Warren versus Berwick. I am sure my friend across the aisle there will be excited about this game too, and I will make sure to keep the house up to date with the result.

Julie Soares

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:06): On 12 May we lost an amazing woman who gave so much to the Elmhurst and Ararat communities and to the entire labour movement. Dr Julie Soares grew up in Melbourne and received an academic scholarship to attend Methodist Ladies' College in Kew, where she was a prefect. She was a proficient runner and horserider and represented her local pony club at the Melbourne show back in 1964. She began poring over the newspapers from age 9 and continued for the next 70 years. She moved to Nowhere Creek in Ripon and then to Elmhurst in the 1990s, where she was secretary of the Ararat ALP branch for over 20 years alongside her beloved sister Lyn Hughes as president. Julie was an integral part of the former member for Ripon's electorate office for 12 years, where she helped thousands of locals in need in Stawell, Ararat and beyond. Later in life, in her late 60s, Julie started studying history at Deakin University. She won the prestigious Philip Brown research award in 2010 and completed her PhD thesis on the Right Honourable Ben Chifley, whom she later wrote a book about titled *JB Chifley: An Ardent Internationalist* in 2019.

Julie was a true believer. She dedicated countless hours to the Labor Party, including through the country Labor executive, where she fought for rural and regional Victorians. She was a loving sister, friend, aunt, great-aunt, historian, author, cook, Collingwood tragic and tai chi lover. She will be missed by so many. Vale, Julie.

Society of Filipino Engineers in Australia

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:07): I would just like to congratulate the society of Filipino engineers on their launch. Well done, Alfie. It was a terrific event, and I was so very pleased to have the member for Box Hill with me.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports**Economy and Infrastructure Committee*****Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users***

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:07): I rise to speak on the important work of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in its inquiry into the safety of vulnerable road users. I had the opportunity to speak on the tabling of this report during the last sitting week, and I did not have time when I spoke last time to thank the committee secretariat for all their work on this important report. A huge amount of work went into combining the submissions, drafting the report and working with the committee members. Can I thank Kerry, Marianna and Alyssa for all of their work on pulling this together. I know there are a number of fellow members in the chamber today. To the member for Bellarine, who was the chair, thank you, and to the member for Shepparton as the deputy chair, the member for Pascoe Vale, the member for Narracan, the member for Glen Waverley and the member for Tarneit.

We certainly heard from many witnesses throughout the inquiry, and particularly I think, with the opportunity to travel into regional Victoria, to Shepparton, hosted by the member for Shepparton, it was really important to hear about the impact on vulnerable road users on regional roads as well and some of the important recommendations specifically relating to regional roads in the report.

Vulnerable road users are road users that are not in a vehicle, and they are generally considered to include pedestrians, motorcycle riders, cyclists, children under seven years old, the elderly and users of mobility devices. Unfortunately, in the event of a crash they often have little to no protection. This inquiry investigated how we can improve the safety of vulnerable road users, particularly in a post-COVID world, where we have seen aggression on our roads, anecdotally at least, increase over recent years. As I said, the inquiry received over 300 submissions, and we held many public hearings. There are 56 detailed recommendations contained in the report, each relating to different findings about how we can improve road safety right across the state.

In my time today I would like to speak specifically about an important recommendation, recommendation 27, which is very important to my electorate of Kew. Recommendation 27 highlights the need to review the location of pedestrian crossings on arterial roads to ensure that there are regular crossings linked to public transport stops, activity centres and schools. My electorate of Kew is home to more than 30 schools as well as dozens of early childhood kinders and centres right across the electorate. There is one particular stretch of Barkers Road, between Burke Road and Power Street but particularly between Auburn Road and Glenferrie Road, where there are many, many schools. There are MLC and Ruyton and we have an early childhood centre there, and then just up the road we have Carey and Xavier. These schools do not have access to a pedestrian crossing on Barkers Road, and despite the number of vulnerable road users and the amount of traffic, of parents often ferrying children to and from school and it being a main arterial road through our electorate on the border with Hawthorn, there is no pedestrian crossing near the schools that allows for people to safely cross the road.

I raised this issue in this place on 20 June last year after two students from MLC actually raised their concerns with me during the Kew Primary School leaders forum earlier that month. On 10 July last year the minister responded that the Department of Transport and Planning would carry out an investigation and identify appropriate treatment options to enhance pedestrian safety along this section of the road. Unfortunately, earlier this month we had a situation where a mother and her two young children were actually hit by a car while trying to cross this stretch of Barkers Road. Thankfully, both the mother and the child did not sustain life-threatening injuries, but of course this incident highlights the need for greater safety and greater opportunities for pedestrians to safely cross the road on this stretch of road. It also brings to the fore the concerns of the local community.

Can I particularly call out the Faculty cafe owners Michael and Cynthia Pelosi, who have been at the forefront of advocating for this safety change. They own a cafe just opposite MLC, next to the 7-Eleven, and often talk to their local customers about the need for improved road safety for their customers so they are able to cross the road safely to attend their cafe. Just last week the member for Hawthorn and I launched an e-petition for this pedestrian crossing on Barkers Road, and it has already garnered over 550 signatures, both online and at the physical petition hosted at the cafe. I seek for the minister to urgently review this pedestrian crossing and look to recommendation 27 in this report.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:12): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report on the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users, which was tabled in this place at the start of the month. The inquiry aimed to look at how we as a government can better ensure that those who are the most vulnerable on the road – pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, those who are not in a car – can be better protected by our road laws.

I was quite interested in this particular inquiry because I have very fond but very stressful memories of my children riding their bikes to school and down to the local shops on the road and trying to teach them about road safety. It was a very, very stressful experience getting them to understand about how vulnerable they were as a cyclist on the road, even in a bike lane, and about making sure that cars

around them were doing the right thing and could see them, that they were always one step ahead and thinking about whether they needed to stop at traffic lights or give way to cars or even perhaps cars that could not see them. Like I said, it is always a very stressful time when your kids are learning how to ride a bike and indeed teaching them the road safety laws as they are growing up and you are trying to parent in the right direction.

In particular this inquiry examined how COVID-19 and the pandemic have impacted road user behaviour. Last year we know these groups made up 36 per cent of all road casualties, and the year before that they made up almost half of all road casualties, at 47 per cent. As I said to my kids when they were learning to ride on the road, if you are hit by a car, the chances of you surviving it are slim. According to the TAC, about 296 lives were tragically lost on our roads last year, and that is 296 too many. Every single one of them would have been preventable.

Sadly, the inquiry has found that in the past three to four years road users' attitudes have become more impatient, more inattentive and, quite concerningly, more aggressive. I know just locally in the inner west about a month ago, a driver was trying to get around a really big truck. He was moving very slowly and doing the right thing – I think he was trying to turn around or reverse into one of the distribution warehouses – and for whatever reason, a guy in a ute got out and started abusing the truck driver. I was sitting there in my car not sure if I should do anything, and indeed he jumped up and tried to get in the cabin and grab hold of the truck driver. My kids were in the car just watching, and I was not sure whether I should be calling the police or filming it or if I should just keep driving. Luckily the driver from the car, who was far, far, far too aggressive, was unable to grab the driver and ended up getting back in his car and heading on. But this kind of behaviour we do see, and it is something that all of us would have noticed over the past couple of years happening on a more frequent basis.

It is fair to say that despite billions and billions of dollars that have been invested into improving our road infrastructure, folks have, unfortunately, never felt more unsafe on our roads. It is certainly an issue that I have been grappling with in my own electorate of Laverton. Some in this place may recall that earlier this year I was standing up here advocating for road safety and a red-light camera – a very popular red-light camera my community wants – to improve pedestrian safety along Leakes Road so that school kids at the nearby Truganina P-9 College, a very, very large school, could get to school safely without being hit by a car. We are quite fortunate that in those instances the incident was not fatal; they were near misses. I note that thanks to our community advocacy there are now mobile cameras set up around this intersection to progress things further and catch those who are speeding. So I do in fact sympathise with the findings made throughout this inquiry.

What the report does tell us is that education alone is not enough to change this type of behaviour, and that road safety behaviour education is something that we here in Victoria should be proud of. We know in the past the TAC's ad campaigns tackling drink driving – we all know 'Only a little bit over?' and 'If you drink, then drive, you're a bloody idiot' – were responsible for driving down road fatalities by 75 per cent from 1989 to 2011. (*Time expired*)

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:17): I rise today to speak on the final report on the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users undertaken by the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, of which I am the deputy chair. The committee received 302 submissions – 230 of these from individuals. The committee investigated how our road users' behaviours changed during and post the COVID pandemic, and the impact on vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, older people, people with disabilities, people with mobility devices, delivery drivers and roadside workers, to name a few. Experts told us it was too early to definitively say with quantifying data what impact the pandemic had on road safety, but it was clear that road driver behaviour has changed. The committee heard from many Victorians who felt that behaviour on the roads was worse since the pandemic. They noticed increased driver aggression and

impatience, and that drivers were inattentive and distracted and displayed risky behaviour, such as speeding, and breaking road rules, such as running red lights and using their mobile phones. A high majority of those who presented to the committee said that Victorians feel unsafe on our roads and more can be done to protect those most vulnerable.

Some of the factors highlighted that may have contributed to poor behaviour on the road following the pandemic are changed patterns in road usage, perceived lack of enforcement and less police presence, post-pandemic stress, anxiety, deterioration of driving skills and worsening road conditions. The inquiry highlighted the increased and alarming upward trend that we are experiencing in road fatalities and serious injuries. The inquiry focused on vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, who so far make up two out of five lives lost on Victorian roads. Alarming, two-thirds of lives lost have been on regional roads.

We learned that it is not really easy to change people's behaviour simply by educating or urging them to be more responsible and that we need to look at enforcement and infrastructure that separates vulnerable road users from motor vehicles and guides motorists to slow down in areas with a high volume of bike riders and pedestrians. The committee recommends reviewing the location of pedestrian crossings on arterial roads to ensure there are regular crossings linked to public transport stops, activity centres and schools; increasing driver awareness of bike riders and motorcyclists while on the road; and creating a mechanism for motorcyclists, bike riders and e-scooter users to report unsafe road conditions to authorities.

As mentioned, the committee received an overwhelming number of submissions, and we are so fortunate to have had so many people share their lived experiences and valuable insights either with a submission or by attending a hearing, which contributed so greatly to the committee's understanding, knowledge and final recommendations. These included safety organisations, research institutes, government departments, councils, peak transport bodies and organisations representing vulnerable road users as well as members representing their communities. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to those that shared their personal experiences and some tragic stories.

I was so pleased that one of the six hearings was held in Shepparton, which gave the locals an opportunity to present to the committee and to share the valuable insights and experiences from a regional perspective. I want to thank RoadSafe Goulburn Valley; Goulburn Valley Motorcycle Club; Shepparton Cycling Club; Cool Heads, which is a fantastic young driver program; Shepparton Search and Rescue; ConnectGV; Goulburn Valley FamilyCare; and the many schools from which we heard from students and parents. Brett Lancaster OAM, an Olympic cycling gold medallist, also presented to the hearing in Shepparton, sharing his grave concerns at the rise in cycling road accidents and fatalities. Brett presented to the hearing with fellow cyclist Rhianon Norton, a champion cyclist. Rhianon highlighted the need for better road safety for cyclists. Tragically, a few weeks after the hearing Rhianon had a serious road bike accident, leaving her with serious injuries. Bringing all of these people and organisations together at the hearing really highlighted the grave road safety concerns particularly for vulnerable road users.

I also wish to highlight that of the 56 recommendations several are focused on regional Victoria. These include working with regional councils on high-speed roads and intersections to support safer road behaviours and the Transport Accident Commission running a targeted campaign for regional roads highlighting the factors contributing to fatalities, including speed, distractions and variables on regional roads. A further recommendation is to prioritise road treatments on regional roads. A priority recommendation is to create a vulnerable road user advisory group to contribute to the development of road safety interventions and place greater emphasis on the safety of vulnerable road users in future urban infrastructure design and strategies. I have highlighted only some of the recommendations in this report; all of the recommendations can be viewed in the report.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank the chair of the committee the member for Bellarine and my fellow committee members for their efforts throughout the inquiry. I also wish to sincerely thank the

secretariat, Kerry, Marianna, Alyssa and Adeel, who put in a lot of work along the way, including planning for the regional sitting in Shepparton.

Environment and Planning Committee

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

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:22): I rise to speak on the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's report *Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works*. From the outset I would like to thank the committee members, especially the chair the member for Wendouree, for their hard work in investigating this issue that matters to so many in our community, me included.

My parents moved from Ireland to Victoria for a better life and worked hard to start a small family construction business in the Geelong area. Growing up it was my first taste of work and eventually became a career. I worked as a form worker, helping my dad on civil construction jobs, helping to build roads, shopping centres, apartments, bridges and so much more that Victorians rely upon. There are so many Victorians who work in construction who contribute so much to our great state. One just needs to take a step outside this building into the streets of our city to see the boom in construction and the economic growth it contributes to our state. Whether it is our government flagship Big Build or much smaller builds like home construction or renovations, the construction sector generates more than 12 per cent of gross state product and employs one in 10 Victorians. Jobs are created and the economy is cultivated, driving growth and investment, and there can be no doubt that the construction sector is one of the most important to Victoria. That is why it is so important that we ensure the long-term future of this sector by protecting this industry from fraudsters and ensuring a viable path forward for all involved.

The committee has done commendable work in identifying just how widespread the non-payment of subcontractors is in this industry and just how deep the personal impacts of non-payment run. Make no mistake, non-payment is theft, and with around 95 per cent of this sector being comprised of small businesses, non-payment of these businesses is the difference between thousands of Victorian families paying the bills and keeping the lights on or experiencing financial hardship. Like so many Victorians who worked for a small family construction business, I also experienced firsthand the impact of some dodgy and shameful operators who made a living off theft. The experience of my family is, unfortunately, not an uncommon one. Too many hardworking and honest Victorians are ripped off and conned. The Victorians who run these small businesses are the backbone of our state, and they deserve better than being treated with such contempt.

I would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that made submissions to this inquiry. I would like to use this opportunity to highlight a particularly disgusting operator who is a shameful stain on the Victorian building industry. A shout-out to Frank Nadinic, who ought to be condemned for his unscrupulous and immoral behaviour. Mr Nadinic is the type of con man that destroys Victorian small businesses all in the name of making an extra buck for himself. His modus operandi is to pay the first invoice, ensuring that subcontractors start the job, and from then on he withholds payments from the subcontractors as they complete works on the project. This leaves Victorian families reeling, losing thousands of dollars or tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars, in this instance, for unpaid works and labour and materials. Mr Nadinic and his family rorted hundreds of small businesses across Victoria, leaving innocent families to suffer the consequences of his conniving robbery. People like Mr Nadinic that inflict such grief and pain on others should be held to account and punished, and this sort of behaviour has no place in Victoria. I send strength and condolences to all those who have been affected by his thefts. I would like to thank the work of the CFMEU in highlighting the disgusting behaviour of Mr Nadinic and informing other subcontractors in the construction industry of his behaviour as a common thief.

I commend the committee's thorough work in providing recommendations such as amending the definition of 'business days' contained in the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment

Act 2002 by creating new provisions to enable contractors to claim a progress payment and creating new provisions to enable at least one payment claim to be made per calendar month. I look forward to hearing the government's response to the recommendations contained in this report. I sincerely hope the committee's work will help put an end to the shameful behaviour of people like Mr Nadinic and all their counterparts, and I look forward to the government's action to help ensure hardworking Victorians are paid for the work that they do.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (10:27): I rise to speak on the report on the 2023–24 budget estimates, and I am sure after the most recent estimates hearings we will have another weighty tome and important report scrutinising the budget coming up. Can I acknowledge everyone who was involved in the recent estimates hearings and again put on the record the need to reform the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and estimates hearings to make them much more useful, to reduce the number of Dorothy Dixers and to allow much more much-needed scrutiny of the budget.

The 2023–24 report into the budget estimates – and I am sure we will see further commentary in the upcoming report as well – talks about rising inflation. It states that high inflation is now being driven by price rises across a broad range of market goods and services. But yet again what is missing in the previous budget and in this one is anything from government to actually tackle higher prices and to actually bring down prices. What is clearly missing from the government's response is a specific policy around prices. Price regulation is the remit of state governments, and there are examples and there are times when state governments have taken action in times of high inflation to protect consumers and to stop price gouging. Right now, with high inflation and with supermarkets taking advantage of high inflation and actually increasing their profit margins, is the exact time and the exact right circumstances for direct government intervention on prices. How much more evidence do we have to hear about the appalling behaviour of the supermarket duopoly ripping off customers, ripping off suppliers, ripping off workers and passing along increased costs and then some to the consumers and increasing profit margins, posting maximum profits while people are suffering – of a duopoly that is locking out would-be competitors? How many more stories do we need to hear of people who cannot afford food, people who are skipping meals, people who are facing constant stress, constant worry and constant anxiety about high prices? How much more do we have to hear? How much more do the government have to hear before they are prepared to take action?

We need our governments to stand up for people and to step in and intervene in the economy when they are being ripped off and when they are facing hardship. For the government to continually say, 'It's not up to us – competition policy is federal,' when we are actually talking about prices policy is flat-out wrong. But there are also times when they say, 'Oh well, we could, but we wouldn't want to.' The fact is that they are not touching an industry dominated by two players that is seeing everyone pay more. What are they going to say next? 'Well, we could have acted, but it's too late.' Now is the time to fight back against the supermarket duopoly.

Just yesterday the Greens released an exposure draft of the supermarket industry bill, which would regulate supermarket prices to stop them from price gouging. The bill shows Victorians how it can be done and shows the state Labor government what they need to do, and it is actually based on previous legislation that state Labor governments have implemented here in Victoria. This is a bill that would give the state government the power to declare a grocery item an essential item. That would then give the Essential Services Commission the power to set a maximum profit margin for an essential grocery item. We have already got the Essential Services Commission, which has the power to regulate prices on essentials like energy and water. It has got enforcement powers for breaches. Groceries need to be treated like the essential items that they are. For too long people going into supermarkets have been faced with unfair price hikes on basics like bread and dairy. It is next to impossible to do a cheap shop

anymore. I urge the government to stand on the side of people and regulate supermarket prices to stop them from price gouging.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:32): I am very pleased to rise and speak on the Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Committee report on the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. As I have said in my first speech to Parliament and through subsequent contributions, with many more young families and elderly residents now calling Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West home I will remain committed to improving road safety for all local commuters, including transport and gig economy workers, people who ride bikes, pedestrians, young people, parents with prams, people with disability and mobility needs and motorcyclists, amongst the many other vulnerable road user cohorts which this inquiry very much considered. That is why I and my local community across Merri-bek were genuinely enthusiastic when the parliamentary committee sought to undertake this inquiry from March 2023 into road safety behaviours and their impacts on vulnerable users following on from the COVID-19 pandemic.

To say that we had strong feedback from across the entire state and community is an understatement. We received in the order of 300+ submissions, with some of the highest rates from any LGA coming from my Merri-bek community. We held six public hearings, including one on 9 August where I was very pleased to welcome the committee members to the Coburg town hall for a dedicated local hearing. We heard from numerous experts, local community stakeholders, advocates and residents about how we can work together to make our roads, streets and suburbs safer for all.

Across the course of the inquiry we considered a significant amount of evidence that helped us reach the 61 findings and 56 recommendations contained in the report, including finding 1, which identified that while there is a lack of published supportive data, overwhelming anecdotal evidence suggests that Victorian driver behaviour has worsened during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of increased aggression, impatience, risk-taking, inattention and rule breaking. This is sadly backed up by statewide overall road toll data, which shows that since the pandemic we have tragically experienced some of the highest numbers of road fatalities in many years. In 2023 vulnerable road users sadly accounted for 36 per cent of all lives lost on Victorian roads, and in 2022 they made up almost half, or 47 per cent, of all lives lost. The inquiry did find that restrictions placed during the COVID pandemic created new travel patterns that affected how Victorians used roads during and beyond that period, specifically through lower public transport patronage, an increased preference for people to travel by car, greater walking and bike riding participation and more delivery workers on our roads. In my community these issues were very much amplified given we are sadly home to some of the highest rates of vulnerable road user deaths, injuries, accidents, close calls and near misses, much of which was reflected in the submissions from Merri-bek council and many other stakeholders.

I would like to acknowledge those who participated throughout the hearings, including Walk On Merri-bek; the Merri-bek Bicycle User Group; Coburg High School walking and riding subcommittee; Safer Walking and Riding for Murray Road, SWARM; the Safe Access over Bell Street Bridge group; the Central Coburg traders association; the Brunswick Residents Network; the Pascoe Vale Residents Action Group; and many other stakeholders, including the Transport Workers' Union, the TWU; the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, the RTBU; and Road Safety Education's RYDA program, each of whom and all the others who contributed I acknowledge and I genuinely thank for their contribution and advocacy efforts.

It was this evidence that informed 56 recommendations, many of which go directly to responding to local priorities and needs, including recommendation 1, for the development of a road user hierarchy that prioritises the safety of vulnerable road users; recommendation 6, which is about reviewing the flexibility of speed zoning guidelines with the aim of decreasing suburban rat-running and reducing speeds around schools and arterial roads within activity centres; recommendation 27, which is about

reviewing the locations of pedestrian crossings on arterial roads to ensure that there are regular crossings linked to public transport stops, activity centres and schools; and recommendations 22 and 21, which are about investigating opportunities for vulnerable road users to self-report minor crashes and near misses, improving the integration of Victoria's road safety datasets and the timely publication of road safety data. Recommendations 4 and 6 went to the establishment of a vulnerable road user advisory group to contribute and help inform road safety interventions and place greater emphasis on the safety of vulnerable road users in future road and urban infrastructure design strategies – and there were numerous other recommendations which covered quite a lot of other vulnerable road user cohorts.

Of course as a government we have been investing significantly in my community to address many of these issues, including through the Coburg level crossing removal project; the Upfield active transport corridor; the \$2.2 million for Gaffney Street; the investment of \$1.27 million for Nicholson Street; upgrades to Sydney Road, Landells Road and Essex Street and Albion Street in Brunswick West; and many other local projects. This report will continue to help us build on that work to link to further improvements over time. In that respect I thank all the committee members for their work: the member for Bellarine, the chair; the deputy chair, the member for Shepparton; and the member for Narracan, the member for Glen Waverley, the member for Tarneit and the member for Kew. I thank the dedicated committee secretariat, including Kerry Risely and Marianna Stylianou, and all the others on the committee who participated. It was a fantastic inquiry. I look forward to the government's response.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:37): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (10:39): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), I table this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the **Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity 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 establishes the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission (Commission) to investigate alleged parliamentary misconduct by Members of Parliament (Members) and Ministers (including Parliamentary Secretaries). The Commission will also be able to receive and refer public interest disclosures to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) and investigate public interest complaints referred to it by IBAC.

The Bill acquits some of the government's public commitments in response to Operation Watts, a joint investigation of IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman, including the establishment of the Commission.

The Bill provides for a number of other key reforms including:

- establishing a new Parliamentary Ethics Committee as a Joint House Committee under Part 2 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* (Committees Act) that will have various functions in relation to parliamentary standards and integrity;
- establishing the existing Parliamentary Integrity Adviser (PIA) in legislation and expanding its functions to provide confidential advice and training to Members and Ministers on matters relating to ethics and integrity; and
- amending Victoria's integrity legislation to integrate the Commission into Victoria's integrity system including allowing the Victorian Inspectorate to oversee the Commission's use of investigative powers and its adherence to procedural fairness considerations.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill engages the following human rights under the Charter:

- recognition and equality before the law (section 8);
- privacy and reputation (section 13);
- taking part in public life (section 18);
- a fair hearing (section 24);
- property rights (section 20);
- freedom of expression (section 15); and
- right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law (section 25(1)).

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

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

Section 8 of the Charter provides that every person:

- (1) has the right to recognition as a person before the law;
- (2) has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination; and
- (3) is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

Discrimination, for the purpose of section 8 of the Charter means discrimination within the meaning of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Equal Opportunity Act), on the basis of one or more attributes set out in section 6 of that Act. The relevant attributes include age, disability, employment activity, gender identity, personal association, political belief or activity, race or religious belief.

The Bill promotes the right to recognition and equality before the law by enabling the Commission to investigate instances of inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour, which includes discrimination against a person on the basis of an attribute set out in section 6 of the Equal Opportunity Act, except on the basis of political belief or activity (clause 3).

This enhances the right of recognition and equality before the law by ensuring that Members and Ministers may be investigated for alleged discrimination in the parliamentary workplace, helping to prevent discrimination on the basis of attributes set out in section 6 of the Equal Opportunity Act.

Section 27 of the Equal Opportunity Act provides that an employer may discriminate on the basis of political beliefs or activities when offering employment to a person as a ministerial adviser, staff for a political party, electoral staff or similar employment. Consistent with this, the Bill excludes political belief or activity from the definition of discrimination (clause 3), so does not promote this aspect of the right under section 8 of the Charter. Political belief or activity is not included in the definition of discrimination, in recognition of the nature of the parliamentary workplace, where people are excluded based on their political allegiances. Such exclusions are necessary for the appropriate functioning of any parliament where different political parties operate.

The right to recognition and equality before the law is also enhanced by other key reforms in the Bill:

- the Bill establishes the PIA in legislation (clause 86) allowing it to continue to provide confidential advice and training to Members and Ministers on their ethical and integrity related obligations.

- The Bill establishes a Parliamentary Ethics Committee (clause 136) in the Committees Act. The Parliamentary Ethics Committee has a number of functions including promoting the Members Code of Conduct to the Parliament and the public, and preparing guidance materials, information and training for Members on integrity and ethical issues.

These reforms will enable advice, training, and resources to be provided to Members and Ministers on their ethical and integrity related obligations, thereby assisting to maintain a safe and respectful parliamentary workplace which is free from bullying, discrimination and other forms of parliamentary misconduct.

In summary, I consider that the right to recognition and equality before the law is enhanced by the Bill.

Privacy and reputation (section 13 of the Charter)

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right –

- (a) not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with (right to privacy); and
- (b) not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked (right to reputation).

Subsection 13(a) of the Charter recognises that the right to privacy is only affected if the interference is unlawful or arbitrary. Lawful and non-arbitrary interferences with a person's privacy is therefore permitted. Subsection 13(b) recognises that the right to reputation is only affected if the interference is unlawful. Lawful interference with a person's reputation is therefore permitted.

An interference will generally be lawful where it is precise and appropriately prescribed in law. An interference will generally be arbitrary where it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust, or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim being sought.

The rights to privacy and reputation as set out in section 13 of the Charter are engaged by a number of clauses in the Bill. These clauses are set out below.

Investigation request

The Commission may request that a person provide any document, information or other thing in the person's possession for the purpose of an investigation (clause 22). The Commission may also request that a person be interviewed in connection with an investigation (clause 24). A failure to comply with these requests without a reasonable excuse may result in the Commission reporting the failure to the House of Parliament (House) of which the person who is the subject of the referral is or was a Member (clause 27).

These powers engage the rights to privacy and reputation as they could be used to require a person to divulge private or personal information to the Commission which could also impact a person's reputation. Reporting a failure to comply with an investigation request to the Parliament may result in personal and private information about an alleged person being divulged to the Parliament and, in some circumstances, potentially publicly.

While the above clauses may engage with a person's right to privacy and/or reputation, this interference is considered lawful on the basis that the Bill precisely prescribes the circumstances in which the Commission can use its powers to request information. Such a request may only be made for the purpose of conducting an investigation in relation to a referral or a public interest complaint.

Further, the powers are not arbitrary, as they will only be used for the reasonable purpose of ensuring that the Commission has the authority to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the conduct of Members or Ministers. The Bill also provides that the Victorian Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring the Commission's exercise of these powers (clauses 22(3), 24(3) and 164(4A)(a)(i)) to ensure that the powers are exercised for an authorised and appropriate purpose.

Investigative reports

At the end of an investigation, the Commission must prepare an investigative report which includes any findings made by the Commission (clauses 28 and 36). The investigative report is provided to the Privileges Committee or the Premier (clauses 31 to 32 and 36(7)(d) to (f)) depending on whether the accused person was acting in the capacity of a Member or Minister when the investigated conduct took place.

Upon receipt of an investigative report, the relevant Privileges Committee or Premier is required to present an investigative report to the House of which the Member or Minister is a Member (clauses 31, 32, 38 and 39).

These clauses engage the rights to privacy and reputation as, subject to the contents and findings of the investigative report, they may enable the Commission, the Privileges Committee and the Premier to divulge personal and private information regarding an investigation. This includes naming a person who the

Commission has found to have committed parliamentary misconduct or against whom a public interest complaint has been upheld.

These clauses are not unlawful as the Bill precisely prescribes the circumstances in which the Privileges Committee may prepare and present an investigative report. They are not arbitrary, as they will only be used for the reasonable purpose of ensuring that the Commission can document and present the findings of an investigation.

Safeguards on the use of private information by the Commission

The Bill includes a number of safeguards on the use of private information to further ensure that the Commission's powers do not arbitrarily limit a person's rights to privacy and reputation, including that:

- The Commission may refuse to investigate a referral or public interest complaint in circumstances where the matter is lacking in substance or credibility (clauses 11(6) and 33(5)) and must refuse to investigate a referral in circumstances where the matter is not supported by sufficient evidence (clause 11(2)). This allows the Commission to refuse to investigate allegations (and thereby avoid impacting a person's privacy or reputation) when such allegations are vexatious or politically motivated.
- Clauses 72 and 75 provide that it is an offence for Commissioners or the Commission's staff to disclose or take advantage of any information obtained through that role. This provides appropriate deterrence from using or disclosing a person's private information for an unauthorised purpose.
- Where the Commission includes a statement in an investigative report that presenting a report to Parliament would be contrary to the public interest, it may prepare a summary report that is suitable to be presented to the Parliament (clause 28(9)). The summary report, rather than the investigatory report, will then be transmitted to Parliament by the Premier or relevant Privileges Committee (clauses 31 and 32). The effect of these provisions is to ensure that the Commission will consider whether making an entire investigatory report available is appropriate, or whether certain matters including personal information should be protected.

Protections for individual referrers or affected persons

The Bill maintains the right to privacy and reputation for a person who makes an allegation of parliamentary misconduct or a public interest complaint (individual referrer) or the person who is directly affected by the alleged conduct (affected person) by providing for appropriate protections in the Bill. These protections help ensure that an individual referrer's or affected person's reputation is not impacted as a result of the Commission's investigation.

Clause 150 provides that the Commission is a body to whom public interest disclosures can be made. This ensures that the protections set out in Parts 6 and 7 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* apply to disclosures made to the Commission, including section 52 of that Act which makes it an offence to disclose the content of a disclosure.

The Commission must also have regard for the safety, wellbeing and privacy of individual referrers when determining whether to dismiss, defer or redirect a referral and when investigating a public interest complaint (clauses 40(2)(a) and 40(3)(a)).

Further, an investigative report must not include information that is likely to lead to the identification of an individual referrer or affected person (clauses 28(4)(a) and 73(4)). The Commission must also consider any request for confidentiality from an individual referrer when determining whether an investigative report should be presented to Parliament (clauses 28(3)(a) and 36(3)(a)).

These safeguards also promote the right to equality and recognition before the law by providing for a parliamentary workplace where referrers have protections under the Bill when reporting alleged bullying, discrimination or other forms of inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Advice provided by the PIA

Upon request, the PIA will be able to provide confidential oral or written advice to Members and Ministers on ethics and integrity related obligations (clause 87(1)(a)). The PIA must keep a record of all written advice provided to Members and Ministers and may keep a record of any such oral advice (clause 101).

These clauses engage the rights to privacy and reputation as the PIA will be required to hold personal and private information which relates to the ethical or integrity related obligations of individual Members or Ministers. Such information may be harmful to a person's reputation.

However, any potential interference with the rights to privacy or reputation on the basis of the above clauses is considered lawful, as the Bill precisely prescribes the circumstances in which the PIA may store a Member or Minister's personal information.

Further, the interference is not arbitrary as the PIA is subject to strict confidentiality requirements, including a prohibition on disclosing any advice provided to a Member or Minister by the PIA or any record of such advice (clause 102(1)(b)). The PIA is also prohibited from complying with an order from either House of Parliament seeking the contents of any advice provided to a Member without the express consent of that Member (clause 102(3)). Such limitations ensure that private and personal information is only used for the reasonable purpose of the PIA maintaining appropriate records.

Conclusion for the right to privacy and reputation

To the extent that a person's right to privacy and reputation may be interfered with through the exercise of the Commission's powers provided for in the Bill, I consider that this interference will be lawful and not arbitrary. Any powers used by the Commission are likely to be proportionate to the impact on the privacy and reputation of the person being investigated, the person who is alleging the conduct and/or any other third party who has made a referral to the Commission.

The limits on the right to privacy and reputation set out above also promote the right to recognition and equality before the law by enabling the Commission to conduct thorough investigations, report on their findings, and help protect people from bullying, discrimination or other forms of inappropriate workplace behaviour.

For the reasons set out above, I consider that the Bill is consistent with the right to privacy and reputation in section 13 of the Charter.

Taking part in public life (section 18 of the Charter)

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Section 18(2) provides that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination to vote and be elected at elections that guarantee the free expression of the will of the electors; and to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

There is limited Victorian judicial consideration of the full scope of these rights (which are modelled on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). However, the rights clearly protect a person's ability to choose their elected representatives, requires those representatives to be accountable to the electorate, to participate in public affairs and to be elected to public office.

The Bill establishes the Commission as an oversight body to investigate and sanction parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints. The Commission will promote a safe parliamentary workplace. This will enable people, in particular Ministers and Members as elected representatives, to perform their parliamentary roles effectively free from bullying, discrimination and other forms of inappropriate workplace behaviour. This will also minimise the possibility that a person who may otherwise seek to be elected to public office is deterred from doing so due to fear of discrimination.

In providing oversight for those participating in public life, the Commission also has the power to recommend serious sanctions against a Member or Minister upon a finding of serious parliamentary misconduct, for a failure to comply with an investigation or where the Commission upholds a public interest complaint.

The sanctions that may be recommended by the Commission include:

- the withdrawal of services or removal of access to certain facilities or any other personal restriction relating to the functions of a Member or Minister (clauses 29(4)(c), 29(6)(c), 37(4)(c) and 37(6)(c)).
- that the Member is discharged from a parliamentary committee (clauses 29(6)(d) and 37(6)(d)).
- that a Member is suspended from the House or their seat is declared vacant (among other sanctions specified in section 31 of *the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978*) (clauses 29(6)(e) and 37(6)(e)).
- the withdrawal of the person's commission or appointment as a Minister (clauses 29(4)(d) and 37(4)(d)).

While the Commission has the power to recommend the above sanctions, it cannot directly impose one of these sanctions which would impact the Minister or Member's participation in public affairs by preventing their participation in the activities of the Parliament, including by limiting their access to certain facilities or preventing their participation on a Parliamentary Committee. The relevant Privileges Committee or the Premier will make their recommendations for sanctions to the relevant House of Parliament which is then responsible for determining the final sanction to be imposed (clauses 31 and 32).

This approach ensures that Members are subject to appropriate oversight by the Commission while balancing the important Westminster and Constitutional convention of parliamentary sovereignty. It also ensures that the Commission cannot directly vacate a Member or Minister's seat, which would deprive the right of the

Victorian public to freely choose their elected representatives at state elections. It is appropriate that only the Parliament should be able to impose such a sanction.

The right to take part in public life is enhanced by establishment of the PIA in legislation (clause 86) and the Parliamentary Ethics Committee as a Joint House Committee in the Committees Act (clause 136). These bodies will provide essential resources for Members and Ministers to help them understand their ethical and integrity related obligations, thereby assisting them to make a positive contribution to public life and a safer environment for all people in the parliamentary workplace.

In my view, the reforms are reasonable, generally enhance, and do not unreasonably limit the right to take part in public life under the Charter, as they seek to ensure that the parliamentary workplace is safe and free from discrimination. Therefore, the Bill is consistent with the right to take part in public life in section 18 of the Charter.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24 of the Charter)

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 right to a fair hearing rests on the procedures being fair and the person who is subject to proceedings having a reasonable opportunity to put their case in conditions that do not place them at a substantial disadvantage.

The Commission will not conduct civil or criminal proceedings and therefore the right is not directly engaged. However, the Commission will be able to investigate referrals relating to parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints and impose or recommend a sanction. As such, appropriate procedural fairness requirements are included in the Bill. These include:

- Clauses 21(4)(b)) and 33(7)(b) provide that when conducting an investigation, the Commission is bound by the rules of procedural fairness. This ensures that the Commission adheres to the procedural fairness requirements established at common law, which includes the right to a fair hearing.
- Clause 164 provides that the Victorian Inspectorate is responsible for overseeing the Commission including in assessing its compliance with procedural fairness requirements. This ensures that there is appropriate oversight to ensure that the Commission is adhering to its obligation of providing a fair hearing to an accused person.
- Clauses 28(6)(a) to (c) and 36(6)(a) to (c) provide that if the Commission intends to include an adverse finding about a person in an investigatory report, it must:
 - give the person an opportunity to respond to the proposed finding;
 - consider any response by the person in preparing the report; and
 - set out the response against any relevant finding in the report.

These clauses uphold the fair hearing right by giving a person a reasonable opportunity to consider and respond to any potential findings that may be included in the Commission's report.

In light of the above, I consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter.

Property Rights (section 20 of the Charter)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property rights other than in accordance with the law. This right requires that powers that 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.

Property rights may be engaged through the Commission's power to request by written notice, any document, information or other thing in a person's possession that the Commission considers necessary for the purpose of conducting an investigation in relation to a referral or public interest complaint (clauses 22 and 35). A failure to comply with an investigation request may result in a person being reported to the House of which they are a member (clause 27). Clause 23 provides that the Commission must return any document or other thing provided on a request under clause 22 when the document or thing is no longer necessary for conducting the investigation.

These clauses allow the Commission to deprive a person of their property rights where the property would be relevant to the Commission's investigation. A failure to comply could result in the Minister or Member being reported to the Parliament. However, the Commission's right to deprive a person of their personal property is clearly conferred by the Bill and as such, any deprivation of property would be in accordance with the law.

Further, any deprivation of property would only be temporary and for the limited purpose of the Commission conducting a thorough investigation into inappropriate workplace behaviour or other forms of parliamentary misconduct. This allows the Commission to provide a safe parliamentary workplace which protects and promotes the rights to recognition and equality before the law (section 8) and the right to take part in public life (section 18).

In light of the above, I consider any deprivation of property resulting from an investigation request under clause 22 will be in accordance with the law and is therefore compatible with property rights under section 20 of the Charter.

Freedom of expression (section 15 of the Charter)

Section 15 of the Charter provides that:

- (1) every person has the right to hold an opinion without interference.
- (2) every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, whether within or outside Victoria and includes information imparted orally or in writing.

Section 15(3)(a) of the Charter provides that the right may be subject to lawful restrictions which are reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputation of other persons.

The right is engaged through the Commission's powers to investigate, recommend, or directly impose a sanction. In these circumstances, Members or Ministers may be punished for written or oral expression in the parliamentary workplace where such expressions are forms of parliamentary misconduct or meet the threshold for a public interest complaint to be upheld. This may be especially relevant to the Commission's jurisdiction to review instances of inappropriate workplace behaviour, where Ministers and Members can be investigated for bullying, discrimination or harassment in the parliamentary workplace.

The right may also be engaged through the Commission's powers to request information or a person's attendance at an interview in relation to a referral or public interest complaint (clauses 22, 24 and 35). This could interfere with a Member or Minister's right to freely express their opinion without interference.

The clauses set out above only limit a person's freedom of expression to the extent necessary for the Commission to appropriately investigate parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints. Such powers ensure a safe parliamentary workplace and are reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputation of people in the parliamentary workplace.

As such, although the right to freedom of expression is engaged, I consider such limitations as reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty (section 25(1) of the Charter)

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law.

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

The Commission is not responsible for conducting criminal proceedings. As such, the right is not directly engaged. Nonetheless, it is important that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the rights of people being investigated by the Commission.

The Bill allows the Commission to report a person who fails to comply with an investigation without reasonable excuse to the Parliament (clause 27). The Commission may also recommend the imposition of a serious sanction on the basis of a person's failure to comply with an investigation request without a reasonable excuse (clauses 29 and 37).

In these circumstances, a sanction could be imposed by the Parliament on the basis of a person's failure to comply with an investigation (rather than an actual finding of parliamentary misconduct or a public interest complaint being upheld).

The Commission cannot directly impose any criminal punishment if a person fails to comply with its investigations. As such, the Commission's powers to report people to the Parliament for non-compliance are necessary to promote compliance with the Commission's investigations. If no such powers were present, person could refuse to comply with an investigation, with no consequences. In such circumstances the Commission would not provide appropriate oversight over Members and Ministers.

Further, oversight over the use of these powers is provided by the Victorian Inspectorate. The Victorian Inspectorate can act to ensure that the powers are being used appropriately and for their intended purpose (clauses 22(3), 24(3) and 164(4A)(a)(i)).

In light of the above, I consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty under section 25(1) of the Charter.

Conclusion

The Bill promotes and protects Charter rights. To the extent that the Bill affects or limits Charter rights, I consider that these limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justifiable.

Hon Jacinta Allan MP
Premier

Second reading

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (10:39): 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:

Introduction and overview

The Government is proud to introduce this landmark legislation which will take yet another important step to strengthen Victoria's parliamentary standards and integrity regime within our system of Westminster government.

This Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill will promote the highest standards of accountability, integrity and behaviour of all Members of Parliament (MPs), including Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries. It will strengthen public confidence in our elected representatives and promote the Parliament of Victoria as a safe workplace for all people. The wellbeing of staff and their right to a safe and respectful workplace is not negotiable.

The Bill has been informed by extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. This includes government and non-government MPs, Victoria's integrity agencies, the Presiding Officers, Clerks of Parliament, the current Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, and other experts and public offices across law, workplace standards, human rights, equal opportunity and gender equality.

This Bill will continue to build on this Government's work to deliver the most significant overhaul of parliamentary oversight in Australia. Together, these reforms provide a modern framework that holds Parliament and Government to the highest standards that all Victorians expect and deserve.

I will now speak to the key components of the Bill, starting with the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission (the Commission).

Establishment of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission

The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 implements a key commitment of the Labor Government in its response to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's (IBAC's) and Victorian Ombudsman's Operation Watts special report. The Government supported all 21 recommendations and made three additional commitments to address parliamentary workplace standards.

The Operation Watts special report found that the current oversight of MPs, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries is limited, fragmented, ad hoc and falls short of community expectations. Individuals who wish to report inappropriate workplace behaviour by MPs, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries are also required to navigate difficult employment and management arrangements. These arrangements can be unclear, lack accountability and disempower people who report inappropriate behaviours.

This Bill will address these concerns by establishing an independent Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission to receive, manage and resolve allegations of parliamentary misconduct and inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour. The Commission's jurisdiction will include receiving complaints of bullying, harassment, discrimination, victimisation and occupational violence and aggression.

The Commission has been developed drawing on recommendations of detailed reviews, the best aspects of existing integrity frameworks in other jurisdictions and accepted contemporary workplace standards.

The Bill gives effect to seven principles that the Commission, once established, must have regard to in performing its functions. These are:

- Integrity – the Commission will support the integrity of the Parliament and community expectations of their elected representatives.
- Independence – the Commission will act free from influence or political bias.
- Effectiveness – the Commission will ensure there is an effective parliamentary standards and integrity regime.
- Accountability – the Commission will facilitate a fair, proportionate and consistent process to hold elected representatives responsible for their conduct in the parliamentary workplace.
- Transparency – the Commission will be open to public scrutiny.
- Respect and safety – the Commission will promote a respectful and safe parliamentary workplace for all participants.
- Fairness – the Commission will support involvement from all participants in its processes, impartially considering all relevant facts and making decisions based on the available information.

The Commission will be seamlessly integrated into Victoria's existing oversight and integrity regime. It will promote a 'no wrong door' approach for complaints about misconduct and a referral and information sharing framework that ensures matters are dealt with by the most appropriate integrity body. The Commission will not assume the jurisdiction of any existing body that already has explicit jurisdiction to deal with a matter.

The Commission will provide a clear pathway for allegations of misconduct to be heard and investigated. By holding MPs, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries accountable for inappropriate behaviours, it will also act as a deterrent, ensuring that all MPs behave to the highest of standards as is our obligation as elected representatives of the people of Victoria.

Critically, the independent Commission will balance the needs of people making a referral for confidentiality and safety with the needs of MPs for protection from trivial or vexatious complaints, and attempts to weaponise or politicise the work of the Commission. It will be bound by the rules of procedural fairness and must act as expeditiously and with as little formality as possible. This will improve the outcomes for all parties involved and avoid the need for unnecessarily protracted and costly investigations.

The Integrity and Oversight Committee of Parliament will monitor, review, and report to both Houses of Parliament on the performance of the Commission.

Further, the Victorian Inspectorate will provide independent oversight of the Commission, ensuring compliance with procedural fairness, receiving complaints about the Commission and investigating the conduct of the Commission and its officers.

The Bill also introduces complementary reforms to the Code of Conduct in the *Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978* (MP Standards Act). MPs will have a positive obligation to foster a healthy, safe, respectful and inclusive environment in the parliamentary workplace that is free from bullying, sexual harassment, assault and discrimination. MPs will also be required to demonstrate respect for parliamentary standards and integrity, including an obligation to comply with a reasonable request made by the Commission.

I will now speak in more detail about the key functions of the Commission.

Functions of the Commission

Making referrals

The Commission will be able to accept referrals from any person or body. The Bill allows reports to be made anonymously to the Commission, to encourage people to report allegations of parliamentary misconduct without fear of reprisal. The Commission will not be able to receive referrals about conduct that took place before it was established, nor will it have own motion powers.

In relation to any MP, including any Minister or Parliament Secretary acting in their capacity as an MP, the Bill defines parliamentary misconduct broadly as:

- a contravention of the MP Code of Conduct
- a wilful, repeated, or deliberate contravention of Part 4 of the MP Standards Act, which is the Register of Interests
- wilful, repeated, or deliberate misuse of work-related parliamentary allowances
- wilful, repeated, or deliberate misuse of the Electoral Office and Communications Budget
- inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour.

Inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour includes behaviours such as bullying, harassment (which includes sexual harassment), discrimination, victimisation or occupational violence or aggression.

In relation to a person in their capacity as a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary, the Bill defines parliamentary misconduct as inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour.

The Bill also defines serious parliamentary misconduct as parliamentary misconduct that is:

- intentional, wilful or deliberate
- occurs frequently or forms a part of a pattern of behaviour, or
- serious enough to provide reasonable grounds for a Member having to vacate their seat.

The Commission will also be able to redirect a report of misconduct if it considers it would be better dealt with by another entity or body. For example, it is expected that criminal matters will be referred onto Victoria Police and matters of alleged corrupt conduct will be referred to IBAC.

The Bill does not limit a person who has made a referral to the Commission from also making a complaint to another body or entity, or otherwise seeking redress for their matter. This will ensure that victim-survivors can deal with an issue as they wish. The Commission will be able to defer dealing with an issue or otherwise dismiss it if it decides the matter will be dealt with by an appropriate body.

Dealing with referrals

As I spoke to before, the Bill requires the Commission to deal with complaints made to it with as little formality, and as expeditiously as possible. This is intended to encourage the Commission to facilitate early and confidential resolution of matters where appropriate.

The Commission can determine that a complaint can be dealt with through an appropriate dispute resolution process. This can occur at any time before, during or after conducting an investigation or as an alternative to conducting an investigation. The Commission must also ensure this takes place as soon as practicable and provide reasonable assistance to the parties during the process.

The Bill also includes safeguards to minimise the risk of the politicisation of the Commission. The Commission will be required to dismiss a referral if it considers that it is not supported by sufficient evidence. The Commission will be able to seek information before it makes this decision. The Commission may also dismiss referrals that it considers, among other things, to be lacking in substance or credibility, trivial, frivolous, or vexatious or otherwise not made in good faith. The Commission will be required to publish guidance on how it will dismiss referrals, to publicly reinforce that the Commission will not deal with politically motivated referrals that do not have merit.

The Bill also creates an offence with a penalty of up to 12 months' imprisonment for any person who provides false or misleading information to the Commission. This is intended to prevent any misleading referrals and to safeguard risks of politicising the Commission.

Furthermore, if the Commission completes an investigation and does not make any findings of parliamentary misconduct, the relevant Member or Minister will have the opportunity to express a preference for the investigation to stay confidential or for the report to be tabled in Parliament to clear their name.

Investigation powers

The Commission may decide to investigate a matter, rather than resolve it through the informal mechanisms in the Bill. The Bill sets out proportionate and appropriate powers to perform these investigation functions, including powers to request information or attendance at an interview. The Commission will also have the power to apply to the Supreme Court to determine if a person has a reasonable excuse not to comply with an investigation request.

During an investigation, the Commission will be required to continue to balance the needs of individual referrers for confidentiality and safety with the needs of MPs, Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries, which includes the right to procedural fairness.

If a current or former Member fails to comply with an investigation request without a reasonable excuse, the Commission will be able to:

- end its investigation and recommend sanctions for non-compliance. The sanctions that may be recommended are like those that can be recommended for a finding of serious parliamentary misconduct.
- report the non-compliance to Parliament. The Parliament can then use its powers to refer the matter to the Privileges Committee to investigate if the Member has breached parliamentary privilege by failing to comply or otherwise pass a contempt motion against the relevant Member.

Tabling reports

The Commission will work with the existing structures in Victoria's parliamentary system to enable sanctions to be determined and reports to be tabled in Parliament.

The Commission will be required to prepare a report at the end of any investigation and to provide these reports to the relevant Privileges Committee (including reports about the Premier), or Premier if the report relates to inappropriate workplace behaviour of a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary.

Following consideration of the report, the Privileges Committee and Premier in turn will be required to table the reports in Parliament (unless the Commission determines that it is not in the public interest to do so). Where the report includes recommended sanctions for serious parliamentary misconduct or failure to comply with an investigation request, the Privileges Committee must consider the report and invite the subject of the report to provide a written response about the sanctions.

If the Committee or Premier determine that a different sanction should apply than recommended by the Commission, they must provide an explanation as part of tabling the report.

These strict reporting requirements will address public expectations that there will be full transparency concerning allegations of parliamentary misconduct by MPs and ministers.

Confidentiality

The Bill provides for strict confidentiality requirements which offer protection to both the referrer and the MP, Minister or Parliamentary Secretaries who may be at the centre of a complaint or allegation of misconduct.

The Commission will also have powers to issue Confidentiality Notices in line with other integrity agencies. Confidentiality Notices can safeguard the integrity of the investigation and protect the privacy, safety, welfare and reputation of those involved in the investigation. The issuing of Confidentiality Notices will be a key aspect of the Commission's work that will be monitored by the Victorian Inspectorate.

The Bill also creates an offence if the Commission knowingly discloses any information acquired in the course or performance of the functions under the Bill without authority to do so.

Public Interest Disclosures

Currently, a public interest disclosure about a Member, including in their capacity as a Minister, generally must be made to the relevant Presiding Officer.

The Operation Watts special report recommended that alternative channels should be created for a person to make a disclosure. The Bill addresses this recommendation in three ways:

- the Commission will be able to receive and deal with public interest complaints that relate to a current or former MP, Minister or Parliamentary Secretary
- people will be able to make a disclosure directly to IBAC, as the clearinghouse for all public interest disclosures
- Presiding Officers will be required to notify IBAC of any public interest disclosures made to them.

These reforms will ensure that the establishment of the Commission fits within Victoria's existing integrity and complaints scheme and that there is a 'no wrong door' approach to reporting alleged misconduct.

Sanctions

The Commission will be able to impose sanctions directly on a current or former MP, Minister or Parliamentary Secretary who has been found to have engaged in parliamentary misconduct. The Commission's ability to impose sanctions balances the ultimate authority of Parliament (over Members) and the Premier (over Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries) with the public interest that the Commission will independently hold Members and Ministers to account.

The full suite of sanctions available for parliamentary misconduct are specified in the Bill to ensure transparency, procedural fairness and consistency. Sanctions may include a requirement to provide a written apology, participate in an education or training program, or enter into a behaviour agreement with the relevant Presiding Officer.

Where the Commission finds a person has engaged in serious parliamentary misconduct, the Commission can recommend sanctions in its report to the relevant Privileges Committee or Premier. The only exception to this is that the Commission can decide directly under the *Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968* that a person is not entitled to their separation payment if they have been found to have engaged in serious misconduct.

The Bill provides guidance on sanctions for serious parliamentary misconduct, informed by existing powers of the Houses and *Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978*. The Privileges Committees, Premier and Parliament will not be obliged to agree to these sanctions. However, where the Privileges Committee or Premier does not agree, they will need to provide reasons when the report is tabled in Parliament.

The Bill also sets out penalties that may be imposed, especially in instances where confidential information has been knowingly disclosed or taken advantage of. This also includes the disclosure of or mishandling of Confidentiality Notices, which carry a penalty of up to 120 penalty units or imprisonment for up to 12 months.

Penalties also apply for any person who knowingly provides false or misleading information to the Commission, who threatens a person making a referral or who seeks to hinder or obstruct any employee of the Commission, each of which also carry a penalty of up to 120 penalty units or imprisonment for up to 12 months.

Appointment of Commissioners

The Bill allows up to three Commissioners to be appointed to the Commission, with one to be the Chair of the Commission. Each Commissioner will be an independent officer of the Parliament. Commissioners will be required to collectively decide actions at key stages of a referral or investigation, and can draw on their collective expertise.

There are strict eligibility requirements for the appointment of Commissioners. Commissioners must be of good character and high standing in the community and will need to have extensive knowledge, expertise or experience in one or more of the specified fields. A person will not be eligible to be appointed if they are or have been a member of an Australian Parliament, Australian Local Council, registered political party or a registered lobbyist within the last five years. This is another important feature to reinforce the independence of Commissioners and to safeguard against the politicisation of the Commission.

Each Commissioner will be appointed by the Governor-in-Council for up to five years. The responsible Minister will propose appointments to the Integrity and Oversight Committee of Parliament, who must unanimously support the recommendation before a Commissioner can be appointed.

Oversight of the Commission

Consistent with Parliament's scrutiny of other independent entities such as IBAC, the Integrity and Oversight Committee will monitor and review the performance of the duties and functions of the Commission. It is not intended that the Integrity and Oversight Committee will investigate specific complaints or review decisions made by the Commission.

The Victorian Inspectorate is a key part of Victoria's integrity system, overseeing and monitoring the proper functioning of integrity agencies within Victoria. This Bill amends the *Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011* to provide the Victorian Inspectorate with independent oversight of the Commissioner and its officers. The Victorian Inspectorate will have:

- Proactive oversight of the Commission, with regular access to all investigative requests and Confidentiality Notices made by the Commission to ensure these are administered appropriately.
- Reactive oversight of the Commission, through the ability to investigate any part of the Commission's functions if someone makes a complaint (for example, about an appropriate dispute resolution outcome).
- Own motion powers over the Commission, to instigate their own review at any time (for example, if they are concerned about the Commission's performance of a certain function).
- This oversight will strengthen confidence in the Commission and its processes. It will also provide MPs, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries with assurances that the Commission's investigation requests will be issued appropriately, and that any findings of a failure to comply without reasonable excuse is justified.

Annual reporting

The Bill provides that the Commission must report annually on the number of referrals received and dismissed, public interest complaints, referrals that have been redirected and those which have been investigated by the Commission, and outcome reports.

The Bill provides detailed and thorough requirements for annual reporting to ensure Parliament and the public can monitor referrals and allegations of misconduct – for example, the annual report is required to contain an analysis of the nature, scope and trends of parliamentary misconduct.

Further key aspects of the Bill

In addition to establishing the Commission, the Bill includes several other reforms to acquit the recommendations of the Operation Watts special report and further promote integrity within Victoria's parliamentary system.

Parliamentary Ethics Committee

The Bill will establish a new Parliamentary Ethics Committee that will have various functions in relation to parliamentary standards and integrity.

The Parliamentary Ethics Committee will be a Joint House Committee, established under the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*. Once established it is intended that the Parliamentary Ethics Committee foster an ethical parliamentary workplace through promoting and reviewing the Members Code of Conduct, preparing guidance about the ethical obligations of members of Parliament, and providing information and training sessions to MPs on integrity and ethical issues, and various other functions. The Parliamentary Ethics Committee will also consider the appointment of the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser.

Parliamentary Integrity Adviser

The Bill will establish the existing role of Parliamentary Integrity Adviser (PIA) in legislation and expand their functions. This will enable the PIA to provide confidential advice and training to MPs, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries on matters relating to ethics and integrity to support them to perform their public duties.

The PIA will be an independent officer of Parliament and sit alongside the Commission. This will ensure there is appropriate separation between the advisory, education and investigatory bodies in Victoria's parliamentary standards and integrity regime.

Provisions are included in the Bill to transition the current PIA to the first statutory PIA role to support continuity. Going forward, the PIA will be appointed by Governor-in-Council on the recommendation of the relevant Minister. The newly established Parliamentary Ethics Committee will be consulted on the proposed appointment and have an option to veto any recommendation within 30 days.

Amendments to other Acts

The Bill will also make consequential amendments to 11 other Acts to integrate the entities established by this Bill within existing integrity regimes and oversight frameworks.

This includes amendments to the:

- *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011*, so that IBAC can refer public interest complaints to the Commission.
- *Judicial Commission of Victoria Act 2016*, so that the Judicial Commission can notify the Commission of any relevant matter.
- *Local Government Act 2020*, so that the Chief Municipal Officer can disclose information to the Commission.
- *Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978*, to create positive obligations for Members and to enable the Clerks of Parliament to make referrals to the Commission for breaches of the Register of Interests.
- *Ombudsman Act 1973*, to link the agencies in the integrity regime and enable information sharing.
- *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*, to establish the Ethics Committee and create new responsibilities for the Integrity and Oversight Committee.
- *Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968* to allow the Commission to make determinations about separation payments.
- *Public Administration Act 2004* so that the Commission will be defined as a special body, the Chair of the Commission will have the function of the public service body Head and the Commission can employ Victorian Public Sector staff.
- *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* so that the Commission can receive public interest disclosures and refer them to IBAC, and so the Presiding Officers must refer a disclosure to IBAC.
- *Racing Act 1958* so that the Racing Integrity Commission can share and disclose information with the Commission.
- *Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011* to integrate the Commission with the integrity regime, and to provide the Victorian Inspectorate with appropriate oversight over the Commission.

Review of Act

The Bill provides that the relevant Minister must seek an independent review of the operation of this Act and the amendments made to other Acts within two years, with the review to be completed within 12 months after it has begun.

This review mechanism will ensure that the effectiveness of the reforms and the function of the Commission are assessed.

Conclusion

In summary, this Bill and these reforms will promote the highest standards of accountability, integrity and behaviour of all MPs, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries.

The Bill will contribute to creating a more positive parliamentary workplace, aligned with community expectations and contemporary standards.

Together with other recent Government reforms, including an updated Ministerial Code of Conduct, this Bill will significantly improve Victoria's integrity regime and further strengthen public confidence in the institutions that serve them.

I commend this Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:39): 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 12 June.

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024*Statement of compatibility*

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:40): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment 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 Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024, 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 purpose of the Bill is to amend the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996 (the MCET Act) to introduce a framework that supports the MCET Act's principal function of managing convention and exhibition facilities in Victoria. The Bill is an important part of the government's initiative to modernise and reform the MCET Act. The Bill:

- a) changes the name of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust (MCET), to Victorian Convention and Event Trust (VCET)
- b) enables the Minister to determine additional functions for the MCET, to meet the broader statewide coverage, and the changing needs of Victoria's tourism and events industries in response to changed market conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- c) updates the functions of the MCET to modernise MCET membership and governance arrangements to strengthen and balance the suitable skills and professional duties of the members of MCET in line with contemporary practices
- d) also provides for the MCET's additional functions as the operator of the new Geelong Convention and Event Centre (GCEC), which will open in 2026
- e) would not affect the continuity of the Trust as a legal entity.

I consider that that the amendments under the Bill do not engage or limit any rights under the Charter.

Human Rights Issues

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

The Bill does not raise any human rights issues. Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2) of the Charter Act

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

Steve Dimopoulos MP,
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events

Second reading

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:41): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

I want to start by commending the Trust, the Hon John Brumby, and all the Trustees, the CEO Natalie O'Brien and all the team for running such an important asset with professionalism and efficiency.

Overview

The Bill will amend the *Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996* (the Act) to change the name of that Act and the name of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust (the Trust), expand the functions of the Trust to meet the changing needs of Victoria's tourism and events industries, and to modernise governance and operational provisions.

Introduction

The Trust is the operator of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), Victoria's and Australia's premier convention and exhibition facility and an important government-owned economic asset.

The Trust is responsible for the development, promotion, management, operation and use of convention and exhibition facilities in Victoria, including the use of those facilities and services for entertainment purposes.

While the Act has adequately served as the Trust's governing legislation to date, there is now a need to modernise and reform the Act.

Reflect the Trust's new role as the operator of GCEC

The Bill will rename the Trust as the Victorian Convention and Event Trust.

The Trust will be the operator of the new Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre (GCEC), which is scheduled to open in 2026. GCEC will be a major driver of jobs and economic growth to Victoria, particularly regional Victoria, supporting new jobs during construction and additional ongoing jobs through operation.

There is broad support from regional and other key stakeholders that the name of the Act and the Trust be updated to reflect the Trust's new role in regional Victoria.

Support Victoria's tourism and events industries

The Bill will allow for the functions of the Trust to be expanded via a determination by the Minister, if required, to meet the emerging needs of Victoria's tourism and events industries.

The tourism and events industries make an important contribution to Victoria's economy through direct spending, employment and investment, and they face ongoing challenges across many fronts, including substantial workforce and skills challenges.

As the operator of MCEC (Melbourne's pre-eminent convention and exhibition venue) and the new GCEC venue (which is poised to become the state's pre-eminent regional convention and event venue), there may be a broader role for the Trust to support the sector to address existing and emerging issues and challenges. Examples of potential opportunities for the Trust could include delivering training to support the needs of the sector, becoming a registered training organisation, or showcasing the industry and strengthening career pathways through, for example, a centre of excellence.

The Bill provides the flexibility to determine and confer the Trust with additional functions, as required, to support Victoria's tourism and events industries, subject to a determination of what the function is and that any determination be published in the Government Gazette.

Contemporise governance arrangements

The Bill will modernise Trust membership and governance arrangements, and support its new responsibilities.

The Bill will increase the maximum number of Trust members from 7 to 9, appointed by the Governor in Council, to reflect the additional responsibilities of the Trust as the operator of GCEC and its expanded functions proposed in this bill.

The Bill will enable the appointment of a Deputy Chairperson and Acting Chairperson to ensure better coverage should the Chairperson be absent or unable to perform duties.

The Bill will expand the scope of conduct that allows for a member to be removed or suspended to ensure greater consistency with comparable statutory authorities within the Tourism and Major Events portfolio, such as the Puffing Billy Railway Board.

The Bill will amend the automatic vacancy provisions of members to provide that the office of a member of the Trust becomes automatically vacant where the member becomes insolvent under administration, rather than bankrupt, as this is considered more appropriate terminology.

The Bill will clarify powers and responsibilities of temporary members of the Trust, including clarifying that a person, acting as a member, will have the same voting rights as an appointed member.

Conclusion

The Bill will amend the Act to support the Trust's new role as the operator of GCEC, and will modernise Trust membership and governance arrangements.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:41): 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 12 June.

Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (10:42): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Aboriginal Land Legislation 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 **Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024** (the **Bill**).

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

Overview

The Bill amends the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1970* (1970 Act) and supports the implementation of the Victorian Government's response to the recommendations of the independent review of the 1970 Act. Specifically, the Bill improves the processes for share transfers; strengthens governance provisions; and modernises terminology in the 1970 Act.

The Bill also amends the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1991* (1991 Act) to remove the Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction for the Ebenezer Mission Cemetery and Ramahyuck Mission Cemetery in line with the aspirations of the titleholders and Traditional Owners for these two sites.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill engages the right to take part in public life (section 18), cultural rights (section 19) and property rights (section 20) under the Charter.

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

Right to take part in public life

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. A person participates directly in the conduct of public affairs by, for example, by taking part in popular assemblies which have the power to make decisions about the affairs of a particular community.

The 1970 Act establishes a Committee of Management as the governance body for a Trust. Clause 10 of the Bill disqualifies a person from being a member of the Committee of Management of a Trust if the person is convicted or found guilty of an offence that involves dishonesty and is punishable by imprisonment for at least three months or is disqualified from managing corporations under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth) (Corporations Act).

By potentially disqualifying a person from being a member of the Committee of Management of a Trust, the Bill may limit a person's ability to make decisions about the affairs of the Trusts in certain circumstances, and therefore, a person's right to take part in public life.

The purpose of this limitation is to ensure the proper governance and administration of the Trusts in accordance with standard governance practices, without unduly restricting who can become a member of the Committee of Management of a Trust.

The limitation is reasonable and justified in the circumstances. The legitimacy and integrity of decisions by the Committee of Management are dependent on these restrictions, noting that a person can only be disqualified in certain limited circumstances. Disqualifying a person from being a member of a Committee of Management Trust on these grounds is consistent with standard governance practices established under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (Cth) and the Corporations Act. A Trust's governance model should be consistent with the current provisional standards that are applied to all land rights and corporation legislation in relation to the disqualification of a person from decision-making bodies.

Accordingly, I consider the potential limitation reasonable, necessary, justified and proportionate in the circumstances. The Bill is consistent with the right to take part in section 18 of the Charter.

Cultural rights

Section 19(2) of the Charter prohibits the denial of Aboriginal persons to enjoy their identity and culture; maintain and use their language; maintain their kinship ties; and maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

The Preamble to the Charter provides that human rights have a special importance for the Aboriginal people of Victoria, as descendants of Australia's first people, with their diverse spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters.

The 1991 Act provides for a Transfer Restriction and a Use Restriction on title granted under the Act. Clause 33 of the Bill will remove the Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction for the Ebenezer Mission Cemetery to enable Traditional Owners to exercise their cultural and land rights over the site. These changes are in line with the aspirations of Goolum Aboriginal Co-Operative as the titleholder and Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation as the Traditional Owner Group Entity which represents the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples of the Wotjobaluk Nations (WJJWJ Peoples) as the Traditional Owners of the land encompassing Ebenezer Mission.

Clause 33 of the Bill will also remove the Transfer and Use Restriction for the Ramahyuck Mission Cemetery to enable Traditional Owners to exercise their cultural and land rights over the site, in line with the aspirations of Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative as the titleholder.

For both Ramahyuck and Ebenezer Mission Cemeteries, the requirement that transfer be made to Traditional Owners will (as distinct from any third party) ensure that any rights that may be available in relation to those sites under s 47A of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) to native title holders in the area may continue to be available. This preserves the existing native title rights of relevant groups through the new legislation.

The Bill will retain the Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction for the Coranderrk Mission Cemetery, in accordance with the wishes of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (Wurundjeri) as the titleholder and Traditional Owners of the land encompassing Coranderrk.

The three cemeteries protected under the 1991 Act are highly culturally significant for the respective local Aboriginal communities and Traditional Owners, who hold deep, longstanding connections to the land, and because many of their ancestors are buried at the sites.

The Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction on the land contained in the 1991 Act do not reflect current government policies which seek to promote Aboriginal self-determination, including in relation to property rights and interests.

During consultations on amendments to the 1991 Act, the titleholders and Traditional Owners of the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Mission Cemeteries noted that the Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction represent a level of government intervention in Aboriginal decision-making that no longer appropriately serves their interests of self-determination. In this way, the titleholders and Traditional Owners of the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Mission Cemetery asserted their cultural rights to determine the future use of their respective cemetery sites. Wurundjeri exercised their cultural rights by electing to retain the land Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction as the titleholder and Traditional Owners for the Coranderrk Mission Cemetery.

By rectifying the 1991 Act's limitations on the cultural rights of Aboriginal Victorians, in accordance with the aspirations of the titleholders and Traditional Owners of the land, the Bill promotes the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal Victorians as described under section 19(2) of the Charter.

Accordingly, the Bill is consistent with the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal persons under section 19(2) of the Charter.

Right to property

Section 20 of the Charter states that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. Property is likely to include all real and personal property interests recognised under general law (including interests in land and shares) and may include some statutory rights, especially if the right includes traditional aspects of property rights, such as the rights to use, transfer, dispose and exclude. The right requires that a law (whether legislation or the common law) authorising the deprivation of property is clear and precise, accessible to the public, and does not operate arbitrarily.

The 1970 Act recognises shares as personal property of shareholders, with provisions for dividends, acquisition, and sale of shares. However, limitations on share transfers are imposed, restricting transfers to the Trust, other Trust members, the Crown, and limited family members. Despite these provisions, the 1970 Act lacks clarity regarding the definition of a "proper instrument of transfer" and the necessary information for such transfers.

Clause 3 of the Bill will empower the Governor in Council, upon recommendation of the Minister, to prescribe an instrument of transfer. This aims to ensure that transfers of shares are executed in accordance with the 1970 Act, thereby reinforcing the property rights of shareholders while promoting legal certainty and compliance with legislative requirements.

Furthermore, Clause 4 of the Bill mandates that the entity maintaining the share register provides written notice of any share transfers to all members listed in the register. Additionally, it ensures that the share register is accessible for inspection upon receiving a written request from a member of the Trust or the Minister. These measures enhance transparency and accountability in share transfers, safeguarding the property rights of shareholders and facilitating fair and equitable treatment.

The Bill does not extinguish shareholder rights under the 1970 Act and does not deprive a person of their property. The proposed amendments outlined in Clauses 3 and 4 of the Bill aim to strengthen property rights by enhancing the legitimacy, transparency, and procedural fairness of share transfers, thereby promoting the protection and proper handling of personal property.

The 1991 Act provides for Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction on title granted under the Act. Clause 33 of the Bill will remove the Use and Transfer restrictions for the Ebenezer Mission Cemetery and Ramahyuck Mission Cemetery to enable titleholders to exercise their land rights and transfer the sites to Traditional Owners. The requirement to transfer to Traditional Owners (as distinct from any third party) ensures that any rights that may be available under s 47A of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) to native title holders in the area may continue to be available. The Bill will retain the Transfer Restriction and Use Restriction for the Coranderrk Mission Cemetery, in accordance with the wishes of Wurundjeri as the titleholder and Traditional Owner for the land.

The 1991 Act does not reflect contemporary government policy which seeks to promote Aboriginal self-determination, including in relation to property rights and interests. The Bill promotes the right to property by enabling titleholders for the Ebenezer Mission Cemetery and Ramahyuck Mission Cemetery to freely exercise their land rights and return the sites to Traditional Owners.

The Bill does not remove the Transfer or Use restrictions for the Coranderrk Mission Cemetery, which limits the Wurundjeri's property rights as titleholder. However, this limitation is reasonable and justified in the circumstances.

Wurundjeri expressly chose to retain these restrictions during submissions in 2021 and 2023 to the review of the 1991 Act. The retention of the Transfer and Use restrictions for the Coranderrk Mission Cemetery acknowledges and honours the wishes expressed by Wurundjeri and is for the purpose of promoting Aboriginal self-determination over their property rights. Additionally, the decision to retain the Transfer Restriction and Use Restrictions represents a deliberate decision to preserve the cultural significance and heritage of the site.

Importantly, consultation on the limitations imposed on the Coranderrk Mission Cemetery will remain ongoing. The Victorian Government remains open to revisiting and amending the 1991 Act in the future should the aspirations of Wurundjeri change over time. This underscores the government's legal obligation to engage in meaningful consultation and accommodation of First Peoples' rights.

Accordingly, I consider the potential limitation reasonable, necessary, justified and proportionate in the circumstances. The Bill is consistent with the right to property in section 20 of the Charter.

Hon Natalie Hutchins MP

Minister for Treaty and First Peoples

Minister for Jobs and Industry

Minister for Women

Second reading

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (10:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which this Parliament stands, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People of the Kulin Nations. I pay my respects to their Elders and ancestors; Elders from all Victorian First Peoples, and any Elders and other Aboriginal people who join us here today. Since time immemorial, First Peoples have practiced their laws, customs and languages, and nurtured Country through their spiritual, material and economic connections to land, water and resources. Victoria's First Peoples maintain that their sovereignty has never been ceded.

The reality of colonisation involved the establishment of laws and policies with the specific intent of excluding First Peoples people and their customs, cultures and traditions. I acknowledge that the impact and structures of colonisation still exist today. For generations, First Peoples have called for treaty and land rights to secure structural change, and to ensure First Peoples have the freedom and power to make decisions that affect them, their communities and Country.

Amendments to the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970

The *Aboriginal Lands Act 1970* (1970 Act) is a landmark piece of legislation created in direct response to the Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal communities' advocacy for land rights. As former mission sites, Framlingham and Lake Tyers represent the State's past racist, segregationist, and assimilationist laws which actively sought to deny First Peoples any form of self-determination.

On the 1st of January 1968, residents of the Framlingham and Lake Tyers communities were listed in the Victorian Government Gazette as members of the respective Framlingham or Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trusts and allocated shares in the Trusts, thereby granting them freehold title of the land. Under the scheme created by the 1970 Act, each member holds part of their Trust, and that Trust owns the land; in that way, the members indirectly own the land. When it was enacted, the 1970 Act was nation leading. It was the first time that the Victorian Parliament recognised Aboriginal land rights and the government's first attempt to recognise the self-determination of First Peoples in Victoria, specifically the Trust communities' right to own and make decisions about land.

While the 1970 Act was historic in returning land ownership to the Framlingham and Lake Tyers' communities, it is now outdated and inadequate at promoting self-determination, enabling good governance and economic independence for the Trusts' shareholders and non-shareholder residents. Not once in the 54 years that the 1970 Act has been in operation has government sought to introduce major reforms to the 1970

Act, nor create a review mechanism to ensure the 1970 Act keeps pace with our advancing work with First Peoples.

Periodic minor legislative amendments over the past five decades have failed to ensure the 1970 Act remains consistent with its original purpose of “*giving back to the people of Framlingham and Lake Tyers the dignity which was theirs in their original ownership of [the land].*”

Though the Victorian Government is proud of the progress made in Aboriginal Affairs, it is unacceptable that the 1970 Act has not kept pace with other legislation, shifting attitudes and policies concerning First Peoples in Victoria and other jurisdictions, including the Victorian Government’s evolved understanding of First Peoples’ self-determination.

In response to ongoing systemic issues, the Victorian Government publicly committed to reviewing the 1970 Act in July 2016, with the aim of improving governance and enabling greater self-determination for the Trusts’ communities. The Independent Review of the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1970* (Independent Review) concluded in 2021. The Independent Review made a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening governance and share transfer mechanisms and increasing the Trust communities’ understanding of the 1970 Act’s requirements and its shareholding system.

In September 2023, the Victorian Government publicly committed to implementing all the recommendations of the Independent Review in two phases.

This Bill gives effect to phase one of the Victorian Government’s response to the Independent Review and will implement 22 legislative recommendations supported in full. Phase one reforms focus on the Trusts’ governance, easing unfair administrative requirements on the Trusts, which has, and continues to, impact their ability to comply with the legislation; resolving issues with the shareholding system and improve processes for share transfers; strengthen the accountability and transparency provisions in the governance arrangements of the Trusts; provide the Trusts with powers to carry out business on Trust land; and provisions to modernise terminology in the Act.

The Bill will also entrench improvements to the governance and composition arrangements of the board of administrators’ model under the 1970 Act, and remove the duplicative financial reporting requirements.

Government is concurrently progressing six non-legislative amendments. Together, these actions will acquit phase one of the Victorian Government’s response to the Independent Review.

Phase two will consider implementation of the remaining 14 (13 legislative and one non-legislative) recommendations, subject to further analysis, community engagement and the implementation of interdependent recommendations in phase one, including clarification of shareholdings at both Trusts.

Reforms to the 1970 Act will not end with implementing all the recommendations of the Independent Review. The path ahead must be one consistent with self-determination, where the State supports the Framlingham and Lake Tyers communities to be self-governing and use the Trust lands for the benefit of residents and shareholders alike.

The Victoria Government stands committed to proceeding apace with required short-term changes to the 1970 Act and a renewed effort to resolve longstanding issues. The amendments proposed in this Bill, in conjunction with the other phase one recommendations, will provide the groundwork for future reform to the 1970 Act.

Amendments to the Aboriginal Lands Act 1991

Efforts to redress some of the impacts of the Victorian Government’s past racist laws were also reflected in the enactment of the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1991* (1991 Act). Under this Act, freehold title was granted over three Aboriginal burial sites at the former Coranderrk, Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Missions to Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative, and Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative respectively, these being the only Aboriginal-led community organisations in those regions at the time.

While the 1991 Act succeeded in transferring culturally significant land to Aboriginal organisations, it conversely restricted First Peoples’ self-determination by prohibiting them from transferring their respective interests in the land (Transfer Restriction) and restricting their use of the lands to Aboriginal cultural and burial purposes (Use Restriction).

This Bill will remove restrictions on the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Mission Cemeteries and allow for the transfer of these cemeteries to the Traditional Owners, thereby preserving rights under section 47A of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), enabling for previous extinguishment of the sites to be set aside, should those groups decide. All references to the Coranderrk Mission Cemetery are to remain unchanged in line with the aspirations of the Wurundjeri Traditional Owners. These changes are in line with the respective wishes of the title holders and Traditional Owners – to empower Aboriginal organisations to freely exercise their land rights and return the Ebenezer and Ramahyuck Mission Cemeteries to Traditional Owners.

Importantly, these amendments to the 1991 Act will also fulfil the Victorian Government's legal commitment in its Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* to use best endeavours to return the ownership of the Ebenezer Mission Cemetery to the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation who is the Traditional Owner Group Entity which represents the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples of the Wotjobaluk Nations (WJJWJ Peoples) as the Traditional Owners of the land encompassing Ebenezer Mission.

These changes to the 1970 Act and the 1991 Act are emblematic of how the Victorian Government should work with First Peoples – listening, appreciating the uniqueness of different Aboriginal groups, and working to give these groups power and control over their affairs.

I see the work to reform the 1970 Act as a critical step on our pathway towards self-determination. Finding a way for the Trust communities to exist beyond the restrictions of the 1970 Act is critical to enable the Trust communities to govern their own affairs, with government support, not intervention.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:43): 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 12 June.

State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:44): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the State Sporting Legislation 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 State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview

The Bill implements reforms in relation to trust membership, leasing powers and acting appointments for trust and board members through amendments to the following Acts (the **State Sporting Acts**):

- *Kardinia Park Stadium Act 2016* (the **KPS Act**);
- *Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act 1985* (the **MOP Act**);
- *Melbourne Cricket Ground Act 2009* (the **MCG Act**);
- *Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Act 1985* (the **PBCS Act**); and
- *State Sport Centres Act 1994* (the **SSC Act**).

The amendments to the State Sporting Acts include:

- Streamlining membership and chairperson appointments and responsibilities including for acting members and acting chairpersons;
- Enabling the Minister to delegate the power to approve leases that are not major leases for Kardinia Park Stadium Land under the KPS Act, the National Tennis Centre and Olympic Park under the MOP Act and the State Sport Centres Lands under the SSC Act, to the Secretary or persons employed under Part 3 of the *Public Administration Act 2004* (the **PA Act**) as an executive, in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (the **Department**);
- Providing the Minister with the power to nominate persons for membership to the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust (the **MOP Trust**), including from Tennis Australia Limited and the Victorian Tennis Association;
- Providing the Minister with the power to make floodlight determinations (under the MCG Act);
- Enabling the Minister to make event management declarations (under the KPS Act); and

- Abolishing of the Kardinia Park Advisory Committee (under the KPS Act) and the State Netball and Hockey Centre Advisory Committee (under SSC Act).

The Bill also amends the *ANZAC Day Act 1958* (the **ANZAC Day Act**), to modernise the description of the area in which sports are held on ANZAC Day, and makes several statute law revisions and amendments to gendered language to enable inclusive application across the MOP Act, the MCG Act, the PBCS Act, the SSC Act, and the ANZAC Day Act.

Human Rights Issues

I have considered the Charter's application to the Bill. The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- Recognition and Equality before the law (section 8);
- Freedom of Movement (section 12);
- Taking Part in Public Life (section 18); and
- Property Rights (section 20).

To the extent that the Bill limits any Charter rights, such limits are minimal and, in any event, are clear, reasonable, proportionate and justifiable in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Recognition and equality before the law (section 8)

Section 8 of the Charter provides that:

- Every person has the right to recognition as a person before the law.
- Every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination.
- Every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.
- Measures taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination.

The Bill promotes the right to recognition and equality before the law by removing gendered language in the MOP Act, the MCG Act, the PBCS Act, the SSC Act, and the ANZAC Day Act. These amendments promote this right by:

- clarifying that the provisions in these Acts are inclusive of all persons, including women and non-binary persons; and
- improving the readability of the State Sporting Acts and ANZAC Day Act by clarifying the persons or office holders to which relevant provisions apply, by replacing references to gendered pronouns with formal office titles, as is standard under such revisions.

For these reasons I am of the view that the Bill promotes the right to recognition and equality before the law across the MOP Act, the MCG Act, the PBCS Act, the SSC Act and ANZAC Day Act.

Freedom of Movement (section 12)

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria, to enter and leave it, and has the freedom to choose where to live. This right extends to accessing public spaces, such as the ability of individuals to move through, remain in, enter or depart from public spaces, including freedom from physical barriers and procedural impediments.

The Bill provides that the Minister may delegate the power to approve certain leases over Crown land, including:

- Kardinia Park Stadium Land (**KPS Land**) (under the KPS Act, clause 9 of the Bill); and
- National Tennis Centre land or Olympic Park land (under the MOP Act, clause 14 of the Bill); and
- State Sport Centres lands (**SSC Land**) (under the SSC Act, clause 50 of the Bill).

KPS Land, National Tennis Centre land, Olympic Park land, and the SSC Land are Crown lands reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (the **CLR Act**) for the purpose of public parks. The Kardinia Park Stadium Trust (the **KPS Trust**) manages KPS Land under section 6 of the KPS Act and may grant leases over KPS Land with approval of the Minister under section 31 of the KPS Act. The MOP Trust manages the National Tennis Centre and Olympic Park under section 6 of the MOP Act and may grant leases over these areas with the approval of the Minister under section 7(1)(a)(i) of the MOP Act. The State Sport Centres Trust (the **SSC Trust**) manages the SSC Land under section 6 of the SSC Act and may grant leases with the approval of the Minister over the various parcels of SSC Land under sections 25B (Melbourne Sports and

Aquatic Centre land), 26B (State Netball and Hockey Centre land) and 26FD (Knox Regional Sports Park land and Lakeside Oval Reserve land) of the SSC Act.

These amendments engage the right to freedom of movement by altering the framework that manages the movement of individuals on Crown land. This is because leases may confer exclusive rights of access to a particular area, causing potential restrictions to freedom of movement. The purpose of enabling the Minister to delegate their power to approve leases that are not major leases, is to reduce administrative burden on the Minister by providing discretion for the Minister to delegate the power to the Secretary or Departmental executives. Delegating power is a necessary part of public administration, and the powers will not remove the mechanism of approval for the granting of leases by the KPS Trust, MOP Trust and SSC Trust. Leases granted by these trusts must still be approved by the nominated delegate, who is required to give proper consideration to relevant human rights in accordance with section 38 of the Charter when making the decision to approve the grant of leases.

The amendments do not alter any rights or obligations of tenants in how they exercise those rights and obligations over the lands, and do not reduce or prevent public access to the lands.

For these reasons I am of the view that clauses 9, 14 and 50 do not limit the right to freedom of movement, and to the extent that the right may be limited, any limitations are lawful and not arbitrary.

The Right to Take Part in Public Life (section 18)

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Section 18(2)(b) further provides that every eligible person has the right to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office. The right to participate in the conduct of public affairs applies to all people in Victoria. However, access to public office is restricted to only 'eligible' persons. The term 'eligible' is not defined in the Charter. Eligibility is to be determined by Victorian legislation, that is, persons who are eligible to stand for election are those that Victorian legislation provides may do so.

The Bill engages the right to take part in public life by:

- amending the KPS Act and SSC Act to abolish the Kardinia Park Advisory Committee (**KPAC**) and State Netball and Hockey Centre Advisory Committee (**SNHCAC**); and
- amending the MOP Act to change operation of membership procedures for the MOP trust (clause 15).

Abolition of KPAC and SNHCAC

The abolition of KPAC under clause 8, and SNHCAC under clause 53, engages the right to take part in public life by:

- removing the opportunity for people to be members of these committees and to participate in public affairs in that capacity; and
- removing the opportunity for the public to engage with these committees.

The current functions of the SNHCAC include to advise the SSC Trust on the operation and management of the State Netball and Hockey Centre and associated land and to operate as forum in which stakeholders of the facilities discuss management decisions and priorities. The SNHCAC primarily operates as an advisory body and does not have any decision-making powers under the SSC Act. Similarly, the current functions of KPAC are to advise the KPS Trust on the operation, management and improvement of the KPS Trust land, and to advise the KPS Trust and the Greater Geelong City Council on the operation, management and improvement of Kardinia Park. KPAC also primarily operates as advisory body that focuses on facility-specific issues at the local level and has no decision-making powers.

Although the Bill abolishes the SNHCAC and KPAC, advisory bodies may still be established on a less formal basis. The Minister may issue a direction to the SSC Trust under section 6A of the current SSC Act in relation to State Sport Centres Land, or to the KPS Trust under section 19 of the current KPS Act in relation to Kardinia Park Stadium land, including to establish an advisory committee. The option to establish an advisory committee in this manner will provide flexibility compared to the current SNHCAC or KPAC, as it will enable many of the substantive functions of SNHCAC and KPAC to be replicated by these bodies established pursuant to ministerial direction and enable a more efficient mechanism for changes to the function and purpose of these bodies in adapting to needs of the SSC Trust and KPS Trust. The option to appoint committees in this manner will also preserve the opportunity for the public to engage on the matters previously managed by SNHCAC or KPAC.

Amendments to membership procedures for MOP Trust

The MOP Trust is established under section 5 of the MOP Act and is comprised of 12 members including 2 persons from Tennis Australia Limited and 1 person from the Victorian Tennis Association (**the Tennis Organisations**). Clause 15 of the Bill changes the way in which membership of the MOP Trust operates in terms of membership procedures, by providing for the Minister make nominations for members of the MOP Trust from the Tennis Organisations, instead of the current procedure whereby the Tennis Organisations made their own nominations. Under clause 15 of the Bill, the Tennis Organisations may provide the Minister with recommended persons to consider for nomination as representative members on the MOP Trust. This clause engages with how representatives of the Tennis Organisations are able to take part in public life by giving the Minister oversight and decision-making power over their nominations. However, clause 15 provides that the Tennis Organisations may still recommend persons to the Minister, and the membership of the MOP Trust must include 3 members to represent the Tennis Organisations. This maintains objective, reasonable and non-discriminatory criteria for appointments.

For these reasons I am of the view that these clauses do not limit the right to take part in public life, and to the extent that it may be limited, the limitations are lawful and not arbitrary.

Property Rights (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of that person's property other than in accordance with the law. An interference with property may amount to a deprivation in circumstances where it effectively prevents a person from using or dealing with their property. However, the Charter permits deprivations of property so long as the powers which authorise the deprivation are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely. The Bill engages the right to property by –

- amending the KPS Act, MOP Act and SSC Act to enable delegation of the Minister's power to approve the granting of leases; and
- amending the KPS Act and SSC Act to abolish the KPAC and SNHCAC.

Delegation of the Minister's leasing powers (KPS Act, MOP Act and SSC Act):

Whilst clauses 9, 14 and 50 of the Bill, that provide for the Minister's powers to delegate the power to approve the granting of leases under the KPS Act, MOP Act and SSC Act, appear to engage the property rights under section 20 of the Charter, these clauses will not operate to deprive any person of any known proprietary rights that are held in relation to the land, and as such the Bill does not engage the right.

As such, I am satisfied that reforms introduced by this Bill are compatible with the Charter. To the extent that they may limit rights in the Charter, those limits are balanced by the benefits of amendment, and reasonably justified to achieve an important aim of enhancing the governance and administration of Victorian sporting infrastructure.

Steve Dimopoulos MP

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events

Second reading

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:44): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 (Bill) before the house today makes many important administrative changes across the *Kardinia Park Stadium Act 2016*, *Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act 1985*, *Melbourne Cricket Ground Act 2009*, *Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Act 1985* and *State Sport Centres Act 1994*. The Bill modernises section 4 of the *ANZAC Day Act 1958* by updating the measure of distance and removing an obsolete reference to the General Post Office. It also removes gendered language across a number of Acts.

Although the reforms appear to be relatively straightforward, the continuous fine-tuning of these Acts is essential for the effective governance of our state sporting assets and the regulation of professional boxing and combat sports.

Together, the State's sporting trusts manage in excess of \$4.1 billion worth of significant government assets, spread across a number of major and complex sporting venues in Victoria while the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board is the body responsible for the regulation of professional combat sports in Victoria, issuing approximately 800 licences, registrations and permits annually. It is critical that our Trusts are provided with a legislative framework that supports them to undertake their roles efficiently and effectively. This Bill seeks to do that.

Firstly, the Bill amends how subordinate instruments are made under the Kardinia Park Stadium Act and the Melbourne Cricket Ground Act.

The change to the Kardinia Park Stadium Act will permit the Minister rather than the Governor in Council to make Kardinia Park Stadium event management declarations. This amendment will significantly reduce the time required to make a declaration however it will not change any of the matters required to be considered by the Minister when determining whether a declaration should be made. This amendment will increase efficiency of process and help to enhance Victoria's reputation as the event capital of Australia.

The Bill also amends the floodlight determination provisions in the Melbourne Cricket Ground Act. Currently, only the Minister may make a determination specifying when the floodlights at the Melbourne Cricket Ground may be operated. The Bill amends the Act to allow the Minister to delegate the making of determinations to the department. This will enhance responsiveness to sector requests by enabling determinations to be made more quickly, especially when applications are made on short notice. Importantly however, the requirement for gazettal of these determinations has been retained.

A number of changes to leasing provisions across various Acts are also made by the Bill. Leases over the National Tennis Centre and Olympic Park are currently granted by the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust, subject to the consent of the Minister administering the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*. This arrangement does not take account of the precinct knowledge held by the Minister responsible for administering the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act and creates additional administrative burden for the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust. The Bill changes the Minister responsible for approving leases at the National Tennis Centre and Olympic Park from the Minister responsible for administering the Crown Land (Reserves) Act to the Minister responsible for administering the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act. The Minister responsible for the administration of the Crown Land (Reserves) Act will retain responsibility for approving leases over Gosch's Paddock.

The Bill contains additional red tape reduction measures in relation to the approval of leases over state sporting facilities including amendments that allow the Minister to delegate approval of leases other than major leases to the department. These changes will affect leasing provisions in the Kardinia Park Stadium Act, Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act and the State Sport Centres Act. The amendments will streamline lease processes while maintaining the requirement that the Minister approve more significant leases.

The Bill will improve consistency across Trust appointment processes and reduce red tape and onerous appointment requirements for advisory committees. Consistency will be improved by providing the Minister with the power to appoint an acting chairperson and/or acting members to the Kardinia Park Stadium Trust, Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust, Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust and Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board. The Melbourne and Olympic Parks Act and Melbourne Cricket Ground Act will also be amended to allow resignations to be made directly to the Minister rather than the Governor in Council. These amendments will simplify the resignation process and increase efficiency by avoiding resignations being reliant on the availability of the Governor.

The Bill also removes outdated provisions prohibiting Tennis Australia and Tennis Victoria employees from being eligible for payment as members of the Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust and will give the Minister the power to nominate members of these organisations on the recommendation of the tennis organisations. This will allow the Minister to decline a recommendation made by the tennis organisations and request a new nominee be proposed, enhancing the robustness of appointments made to the nominated positions.

The Bill will increase the maximum number of members on the Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust from eight to nine and it will increase membership of the State Sport Centre Trust from seven to 11 to ensure sufficient resourcing to meet the demands of an expanded infrastructure portfolio.

The final administrative change made by the Bill is to dissolve the State Netball and Hockey Centre and Kardinia Park Advisory Committees and repeal their establishing provisions. These committees are advisory bodies with no decision-making powers and are generally a forum in which stakeholders of the facilities and community groups discuss management decisions and priorities. Members of these committees are currently required to comply with unnecessarily onerous appointment processes which has resulted in several representative nominees declining to be formally appointed. The Kardinia Park Stadium Act and State Sport Centres Act both already contain provisions that will allow similar but less formal bodies to be established by

Ministerial Direction with the same practical effect as the current advisory committee provisions but with greater flexibility to encourage stakeholder participation.

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 12 June.

Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:45): I rise today to speak on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024, and it is a very, very sad day for so many Victorian families and so many Victorian communities, businesses and people who enjoy the beauty of native hardwood timber. If you look around this chamber today, you can see part of the Parliament's beauty is that it is filled with this beautiful timber which has been harvested from our old-growth forests across the state by our forefathers up to 150 years ago. In fact this is an industry that has sustained Victoria's economy and has sustained our Victorian forests for 150 years. I would like to acknowledge all of those workers that have put so much into this important sector and important industry over that time. May I also offer an apology for how they have been treated by the Labor government over the past 10 years, because it has been nothing short of appalling.

We know that our forestry workers, particularly those in the native hardwood timber industry, offer so much more than what has been portrayed by the Labor government. We know that they care for the environment and they care for the forests that they work within. We also know that they have provided intergenerational care for our forests; it is something that is at the heart of so many families who have worked in forestry and have connections in forestry going back 150 years. We have utmost respect for those people – for the skills that they have and the equipment that they have – and respect for the people who are willing to step up in our times of trouble. We know that these are the people who keep our tracks – including our fire tracks – clear to ensure that we can have good entry into our forests. We know that they have got immense skills we call upon in times of bushfire. They are the ones who build our firebreaks. They are the ones who put their lives in danger during a fire. When there is smoke filling their cabin, when there are sparks flying and when they know that there are burning trees around them, they are the ones out there building the firebreaks. It is so often that they are the ones who are put in a position where they are putting their lives at risk to save the lives of others and the livelihoods of others. And yet here we are today with one of the final pieces of legislation that will shut down their jobs, their industry and their ability to access equipment and machinery to keep our community safe during bushfire, which will take away their opportunity to have a livelihood and take away so many businesses in rural communities that have been established simply because of the native timber industry. It will take away the opportunity for a generation of young people to learn a trade and to know that they will be following in the footsteps of their father and their grandfather and their great-grandfather. They will not be able to go ahead and do that.

This is something that is absolutely heartbreaking for the families that will lose their livelihoods through this legislation passing today, and it is something that strikes deep whenever you have a conversation with someone who is directly impacted. The number of people who I have spoken to who have had mental health issues that they have faced over the Labor government's decision to unnecessarily shut down this industry is difficult. It is difficult to hear stories of people who think that the best option for them is to take their own life because they will no longer be able to provide for their

children and their family. That is a situation that we are in in so many parts of regional Victoria simply because we have got an ill-thought-through political decision which is having catastrophic impacts on real people on the ground, on all of the workers who have worked within the Victorian timber industry – 15,000 Victorians. Of course within this legislation it winds up VicForests, which directly employed 140 staff.

We cannot talk about forests without addressing some of the statements that have been made in the past and some of the shifting points that have been made to apparently support the shutdown of Victoria's sustainable native timber industry. Firstly, for some reason we have to lock up trees; we can never harvest trees because that will damage the environment. Trees capture carbon. We look around this place and we can see timber – that is captured carbon. Trees capture the most carbon in the first 20 years of their life. When you harvest a tree, you actually are capturing carbon and storing it in a way that can also be quite beautiful and useful as a building product. Unfortunately, there has also been this absolutely ridiculous thought that once you cut down a tree another tree will not be regrown in its place. It is simply not true. When a tree is taken down in a forest, there is another tree that grows in its place. It captures more carbon. It is environmentally friendly.

Peter Walsh interjected.

Emma KEALY: Absolutely. As the member for Murray Plains has just said, every tree that is taken is replanted. This is a sustainable industry. If you go to a fabulous building down at the Docklands – the Nationals went down with Planet Ark to look at the Docklands library – it is predominantly built from native timber. And it was regrown I think in a phenomenal time. The timber that they used in that building was regrown in a matter of 6 minutes, I think it was, across the nation.

This is a wonderful industry. It is something that we have built Victoria on. We have grown our economy through this. We have created jobs. We have supported businesses. We have supported the environment. We have been able to produce our own building materials grown in our own state. We have been able to control the industry and the environment to ensure that we are putting best practice in place. And yet through Labor's decision to shut this industry down we now cannot secure supply of native timber from Victoria. At the moment we are looking to Tasmania, but so often we are also looking at hardwood forests overseas, in countries where we do not know their environmental controls to ensure that endangered wildlife is looked after and that they are not taking out huge tranches of forest which will not be replanted and will ensure that we lose critical species across the globe. We have just shifted a thought bubble of what the impacts are in Victoria, which are not based on fact – there is no evidence behind it – and we have shifted that to something overseas. For people who might prosecute and say that this is a good decision for the environment, essentially what they have done is put the Victorian building industry on notice that we are no longer going to use hardwood timber in our buildings. We are going to mine steel – we are going to enhance mining. I just find that sometimes there is this hypocrisy that is never called out, and the government have pandered to this at every single step in the shutdown of the native timber industry. It is an absolute disgrace.

I think we should also touch on, while I am speaking about putting some facts on the table and what the sustainable native timber industry means for the environment, how the Leadbeater's possum has been used as a reason to shut down the entire timber industry. There is no doubt that at one point in time in Victoria there was deep concern that there were very, very few Leadbeater's possums and that these were predominantly in areas which were old-growth forest, which is where forestry was being undertaken. In the early days this was used as a justification for shutting down the sustainable native timber industry. However, there have been numerous studies undertaken since that point, and we now have so much evidence available to us that shows there are thousands of Leadbeater's possums. They do not live just in old trees in certain forests which happen to be host to the native timber industry; these Leadbeater's possums are in other timber areas as well. In fact they have been in regrowth forests of up to only 15 years of age.

For me, I do not find it surprising that any animal is going to be a little bit picky about what tree it lives in. It is like, 'No, no, I'm not going to live in that tree; that's not a hundred years old. I refuse to do that. I'm going to only live in this one over here.' This is ridiculous. Possums will nest in an environment which is a tree that is a safe environment that will bear the weight of itself and its young ones. So of course in areas of new growth forest of up to 15 years we are actually seeing Leadbeater's possums. It is no surprise; it is logical when you step back and take some of the political argument out of this whole discussion and debate. Yet rather than looking at the evidence we have seen a Labor government that supposedly stands up for workers, that supposedly is willing to put that front and centre as their whole reason for being: 'If you don't vote Labor, you're not voting for workers. You must vote Labor.' Well, if there is an exhibit A within this about how Labor are willing to turn their backs on their own people when it comes to the crunch, when they are looking at negotiating deals for their own votes, this would be it. This is exactly the evidence that we see of Labor being willing to transact and trade off a viable and sustainable industry which employed thousands of people all for the sake of preferences and votes. A transactional Labor government is not what Victorians want nor what they deserve.

This legislation is coming through today, and I understand that the government are trying to truncate debate on this. They want to make sure debate is cut off at lunchtime. So we will have just over two hours to debate the shutdown of an entire industry in Victoria because the Labor government are too ashamed of what they are doing. They are not willing to step up and say why they have done that, why they have appeased extreme environmentalists rather than looking at the evidence and standing up for the Victorian workers that they purport to represent – because they do not. They have let down thousands of Victorian workers in the timber industry, and it will not be forgotten. This is no surprise because over the past 10 years there have been so many lies perpetrated by the Labor government on the reasoning behind this change – and they had absolutely no reason to do so – whether it was around the history of the Leadbeater's possum; whether it was about problems with VicForests, that they had done the wrong thing; or whether it was about the legal advice that we heard was the reason. They said they could not change the code of practice, that there was no legal way to protect the industry, because there was legal advice that they could not do so. Then we asked the Premier, 'Could you provide it?' – no, he could not.

I want to take the opportunity to actually put on the record what Labor have said in the past about the timber industry and how they would support the industry, how they would secure the future of the industry, how they would ensure that we have a viable native timber industry going into the future and how they would support timber workers during the transition out of this industry when in fact they have done anything but that. It was back in 2019 when then Premier Andrews put out a statement which was entitled 'Securing the future for forestry industry workers':

The Andrews Labor Government has today acted to ensure a long-term and sustainable future for Victoria's forestry industry – and for the Victorian workers who rely on it.

What an absolute load of rubbish that was. In this document Labor also promised that this industry would not be shut down until 2030, which was bad enough, but it did not actually happen. Labor were breaking their necks to make sure they could shut this industry down sooner rather than later and let down exactly who they said they were standing up for in this same media release – the Victorian workers who rely on a sustainable native timber industry. We see in this release that it was about a transition plan which would:

... help fund community projects that support local businesses and help create local jobs.

And this of course included the:

... \$110 million allocated in the *Victorian Budget 2017/18* to help ensure ongoing access to affordable, locally-produced paper products.

We have seen none of that expended six years later; not one cent of that \$110 million has been spent. We have got so many lies, and now we have got Victorian workers who are left with nothing, but more

importantly we have got an industry which has not been able to transition to plantation timber. It was nothing more than a thought bubble to get away with a dirty deal with the Greens that Labor did in exchange for votes. That is exactly what it is. We actually know that the government's promise of 16 million trees that would have been planted as a result of that policy resulted in just 4000 trees planted in its first year – just 4000. They promised 16 million; we got 4000.

It is little wonder – I do not think anybody on this side of the chamber is entirely surprised – that Labor says one thing and then does another, because it is a consistent theme: 'We're supporting Victorian workers, but we're not going to pay you a transition payment at the other end of it. We're going to plant 16 million trees to guarantee your jobs and the transition to plantation timber, but we've only planted 4000.' And let us not forget those 4000 trees that have been planted are not ready for harvest yet. It is hardwood timber; it takes some time. Having a little sapling that you are going to harvest is not going to be very sustainable for a long period of time in order to generate a lot of timber decking or other timber products that we use in our buildings. So I think that all of it was absolutely found out to be nothing more than hot air from the Labor government, and this is what we see over and over and over again.

If we go to 2020, there was a media release entitled 'New nursery to grow more timber and Gippsland jobs'. This was at Nowa Nowa in East Gippsland. This is of course a \$10 million fund: 'We've got Nowa Nowa. We're going to have a great nursery, and it is going to really save jobs through that area.' Well, I spoke to the member for Gippsland East earlier today just to see what the update was, because that sounded great; it sounded like Labor were actually doing something. What a surprise – Labor said it would happen; they did not do it. In fact this never happened. This project never commenced despite Labor promising in October 2020 that the project would commence in the coming months. Still here we are four years later. It still has not started.

But it is a bit of a movable feast as well, because not only is the project not going ahead in Nowa Nowa, there was talk for a little while: 'Well, maybe we'll go to Bairnsdale, and now we're just flirting with another idea because that did not happen.' That did not eventuate either. And now we are flirting with another idea at the moment that it might go to the Latrobe Valley, some 200 kilometres away. I am not sure what 'local' means in the Labor vernacular, but I would not have thought that local jobs for Nowa Nowa would translate to jobs 200 kilometres away in a nursery that may or may not open sometime in the near future. The way that it is moving, member for Gippsland East, I am feeling a little bit fortunate, because I am on the opposite side of the state. It is gradually moving over to the west. You never know, we might see perhaps in a decade or so this project actually delivered in the electorate of Lowan. It is local jobs – not for your people, not for your community, not what was promised by Labor, but it might be something. I am not getting my hopes up, though, member for Gippsland East, I must say, because Labor never, ever deliver what they actually say they will do.

Going back into these media releases, going back to action plans and strategic plans, going back to anything that the government have produced over the early 10 years of their tenure in their time as government shows that they are absolutely full of hot air. They do not deliver anything, and you can never, ever trust what they say. Even more than that, when it comes to this, we know taxpayer money was allocated to this project. We know, though, that Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects and it is Victorians that are paying the price, and in this instance it is the people of Nowa Nowa.

Then of course we have got the next stage of this whole journey with Labor of bolstering the *Victorian Forestry Plan* back in 2021. We have got a slight shift in what we are focusing on:

The plan ensures critical supply chains that rely on native timber will have enough time to adjust ahead of the phase out in 2030 ...

So still we are here at 2030. Of course we had later on another change that would shut down the industry early. This is very, very interesting, because this was Labor's very poor attempt at trying to shut off the series of vexatious litigations that VicForests was facing over the past 10 years.

We know that there was always an opportunity to do this right, and can I acknowledge the former member for Narracan, Gary Blackwood, who tried on numerous occasions to shut down this legal loophole which existed in Victorian legislation which allowed third-party litigants to take to task VicForests for failing to uphold the Code of Practice for Timber Production. There is a clause in the New South Wales timber legislation which closes out this opportunity for third-party litigants. It can be done; it has been done, and it has protected the native timber industry in New South Wales. I recall – and I will refer now to the member for Gippsland South, who does a fabulous job in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) giving the ministers and the Premier a hard time – I think it was two years ago –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Emma KEALY: Last year it was. Just last year there was questioning of the then Premier Daniel Andrews around why the Victorian government did not implement similar protections against third-party litigants so VicForests could just get on with doing what they do well and not be put down the financial black hole of continuous legal action by environmental activists who were using the court system to send them broke and shut them down. The response from Premier Andrews was that they had legal advice that that was not possible. There were a few eyebrows raised at that point in time, because of course, as I have just gone over, New South Wales has exactly this same clause within their own legislation. Dutifully the member Gippsland South said, 'Well, if you've got the legal advice, can you please provide it?' Of course it could not be provided. Just trust Daniel Andrews or anyone in the Labor government after we have got – and this is just a small tranche of the media releases – what has been said on the record by Labor about how they support the industry and how they support workers.

Labor cannot be trusted, and Daniel Andrews could not be trusted that legal advice was actually sought or that it actually represented what the former Premier said to PAEC, because we know that New South Wales put those legislative protections in place and they now still have a sustainable native timber industry. It is Labor that refused to go down that pathway. They refused to protect the workers. They refused to protect the native timber industry in Victoria. They refused to protect our communities that rely on the cash flow from these native timber businesses – harvest and haulage businesses. It is Labor's fault that Victorians are being punished at this point in time, and they have never, ever been up-front about what they were doing and what their plans were and what their secret, dirty little deals were with the Greens in the lead-up to the 2018 election and the 2022 election. It is a disgrace. It should be called out, and I am glad that I am able to do so today.

Of course then we have got in 2023 'Delivering certainty for timber workers', a very familiar headline to what we heard back in 2019 when Labor pulled forward the transition away from native timber logging earlier than planned to 1 January 2024. This has seen of course a shift in why we are going to shut down the native timber industry – it is now not about the Leadbeater's possum, it is now about the bushfires. The bushfires are now their fault; that is why we are shutting down the industry. It has got nothing to do with Labor doing sneaky little deals behind the scenes for votes, willing to transact our jobs and our industry for votes. 'Of course that's got nothing to do with it'; I do not believe that for a second. We see at the bottom of this release – I will not read through all of it – that it summarises, and this is what Labor says, 'It simply cannot continue.' Well, the truth is, as I have gone through today, it never had to end.

I would like to move now to talk about some of the timber industry workers and the operators who have not had their transition payments dealt with in an appropriate timeframe. But before I go through the horrible stories of people who have been faced with the shutdown of their industry and who have also been faced with no way of getting out of their industry, I would like to put forward a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until fair compensation for loss of income is received by all those impacted by the Labor government's early closure of the sustainable native timber industry.'

This is so important because it is the bit that is hitting hard for families, particularly across Gippsland, and I hope that Labor will give every member of this place who has workers impacted by this shutdown a chance to put on record the stories of people in their electorate, because they deserve to have their stories heard in this place. It is very important. I implore the government to allow this debate to continue at least until the end of today. The stories that I have heard are just devastating. They tell the story of seed collectors who have missed out on funding through the transition payments. We also hear stories about harvest and haulage operators who simply have not got a fair deal when it comes to what they are being offered versus what the value is of their business, what the value is of their assets and what the impact is on the future of their jobs, because there is no security for jobs in the local area going forward.

I have a number of examples. I will not go into the details of all of these, but it paints a picture of how badly the transition payment scheme has been rolled out. Let us not forget that Labor again promised that this would be finalised by the end of last year. There was supposed to be certainty for anybody who lost their job, who lost their business. That has not occurred. It is an absolute disgrace that Labor are still pushing on and closing down VicForests through this legislation without addressing the failure of the government to provide a fair deal for all people who are impacted by the shutdown of this sustainable industry but also to make sure that nobody misses out. We do not have any certainty for all workers that they will be able to receive a transition payment, but further there is no security at the moment for people who need to access small volumes of timber out of those native timber areas for sale. So we need to ensure there are also protections in there for salvage and sale of timber retrieved out of those forests. It is devastating to read these stories:

My business has been totally destroyed, and all employees have had to be made redundant. The current employees' lives have been turned upside down with most of them left with little prospect of work in the town.

I was recently talking with a courier business owner who told me he was closing his business down, which had been in operation for about 25 years, and moving interstate, as the industry shutdown had cost him 50 per cent of his work and it was no longer viable. This is just one example of the flow-on effects of closing the industry down. When there was a quantification within this business around the assets that would receive payment as part of the transition payments, they said:

The assets were my successful business that I had spent 30 years building up and my highly skilled and loyal staff which have all been lost so I'm not sure how I had put a figure on that.

How do you put a figure on the skills and the livelihoods of people who have been built up within a business over a 30-year period only to be told by the government of the day, 'Your business is no longer important to us; we've sold it out,' and you now have nothing?

I do not blame Labor for wanting to wrap up debate on this, because there is no element, when we talk about this shutdown of sustainable industry, that Labor can be proud of. I think it is an absolutely shameful situation where we are shutting down any industry in Victoria for no reason whatsoever. As I have stated in my contribution, native timber industry is sustainable. Trees regrow, and when they do regrow they capture more carbon. We can manage our forests so that it is sustainable in terms of supporting the wildlife that lives within these forests. We have research that backs up that the Leadbeater's possum is no longer dwindling in very small numbers. It is actually flourishing in large numbers. It is nesting in areas of new growth forest. We know that we have got lots of businesses, individuals and families who have missed out on transition payments, but more importantly, they are facing a prospect of not being able to support their communities at times of bushfire. We have got a future where we do not know where our next generation of kids are going to go to school, because we do not have the jobs to support them. It is a devastating situation that Labor has impacted so many small regional communities that rely on a flourishing and thriving timber industry in Victoria. This never had to happen. I absolutely grieve for the sustainable native timber industry in Victoria, and I do call on the government to support our reasoned amendment and to ensure that transition payments are all fair, finalised and paid before this legislation passes.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:15): I am very pleased to rise and speak on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024. I will remind the chamber that in 2019–20 Victorian bushfires caused more than 1.5 million hectares of public and private land to be burnt, including 1.39 million hectares of forests and parks, plantations and native timber assets, critical animal habitats and water catchments. Were we to just stomp on blindly, pretend nothing happened and hope the trees and forests would magically regenerate – we cannot do that. Climate change is here, it is real, and I cannot believe what I am hearing from the opposition. The longer you delay this transition, the harder it is for those workers. If they genuinely cared for those workers, they would be backing in this transition. It is the right thing to do for those workers, for the future of our forests and for a sustainable industry into the future. When you are talking about certainty, just hoping that these forests will magically regenerate is not going to solve the problem.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Albert Park is misleading the house. The announcement by the government to shut down the industry occurred before the bushfires she is referring to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Member for Albert Park, I ask you to come back to the bill, please.

Nina TAYLOR: We know that a sustainable timber industry into the future is actually reliant upon our government making these critical changes, because we actually care about our Victorian forests for the future for all Victorians to enjoy. We know that traditional owners have a deep and profound connection to the land that has been going on for more than 65,000 years. Biodiversity – when we are talking about biodiversity it is not just a matter of simply replanting a tree and hoping that that critical interdependence of all the species, whether they be native flora or fauna, will just magically recur. It is incumbent upon us as a government to do the right thing.

As part of that, talking about the transition – I am very happy to speak to that – we decided to make the decision to end native timber harvesting in state forests in 2024, with existing supports brought forward and scaled up, meaning every single timber worker will be directly supported to find a new job. Let us look at that issue. Forest contractor workers have been secured with contracts for forest management works, enabling them to continue to work in the forests they know so well and to contribute to bushfire risk reduction. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action has created approximately 80 new roles to integrate these activities into its broader forest and bushfire risk management operations. The government's free TAFE program has been able to retrain workers, helping them to get jobs in growing regional industries like construction, agriculture, transport and manufacturing through TAFE Gippsland and other key TAFE campuses in timber communities. This initiative was supported by up to \$8000 in retraining vouchers for courses inside and outside the TAFE network. Timber communities worked with us to identify the jobs and growth sectors that will drive a sustainable future for local communities. We will continue to invest in these opportunities to support and create jobs through the Community Development Fund.

The government also provided support to local businesses relying on Victorian hardwood supply to manage the transition process. The supply chain resilience package supports business continuity and provides assistance to help manufacturing and other businesses to make the transition to future opportunities.

Tim Bull: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Albert Park has got her eyes firmly fixed and appears to be reading. It would appear it is word for word. At least get some eye contact with the chamber.

Nina TAYLOR: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I like to refer to facts, unlike those of the opposition, who are intent just to speak from the air and say, 'We hope trees will regrow themselves.'

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Member for Albert Park, on the point of order, were you reading your notes?

Nina TAYLOR: I was just referring to facts.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I bring the member back to the bill, please.

Nina TAYLOR: It is a cheap shot from the opposition. It is because there are some inconvenient truths being brought to the attention of the chamber. That is all that is about. That is the best they have got to rebut these arguments, and really it is a cheap shot altogether. I should say –

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is defying your ruling.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Member for Albert Park, I guide you to please come back to the bill.

Nina TAYLOR: Okay. We have really touched a sensitive point, I can see, with the opposition. They really do not understand what sustainability actually is. On the one hand we have to transition those workers. It is the right thing to do. On this side of the chamber we did have 1.5 million hectares of forest that was burnt in the bushfires. Were we meant to just say, ‘Oh, never mind, we’ll just carry on and hope this industry continues.’ No, on the contrary, we deeply care about those workers and the future of the economy of those local communities. This is why this transition is absolutely paramount – so that all Victorians have forests and we have a balance for the timber industry when we are looking at plantation timber into the future. Hopefully those opposite will one day read a book on biodiversity and understand the delicate interconnection of species and also the depth of our forests and that cultural heritage and what it means for our traditional owners.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (11:21): Vale, native timber industry here in Victoria. We are standing here today because of the treachery – I repeat, treachery – of the Labor government. They have actually sold out the workers of Victoria. They have caved in to illegal protesters to close down an industry. In no other industry in Victoria would a Labor government allow lives of workers to be put at risk by illegal protesters, but that is what they have done in this case. You have had spikes driven into trees, you have had people with their chainsaws and the risk of them bouncing back and killing them and you have had heavy machinery damaged, hoses cut, which all puts lives at risk. But no, Labor has turned a blind eye to that, because they support illegal protesters in the timber industry. It suits them politically, but it does not suit the workers that work there. The Labor Party should have stood up for their workers rather than selling them out to illegal protesters and Greens preferences in the city here, because that is what this is all about. The Labor Party has sold out regional Victorian workers for Greens preferences in inner-city seats. That is all this is about.

Can I place on record on behalf of the Liberal and National parties our support and appreciation for the generations of people who have worked in the native timber industry here in Victoria, what they have contributed to actually build the great state we have and the timber they have supplied. Look around this chamber. Where would we be without timber? Look around the houses we live in. Where would we be without native timber for the doorframes, for the doors, for the flooring? Chipboard is fine, but native timber actually builds a really attractive appearance for your particular house.

Can I also put on record our appreciation for Rob Green and Monique Dawson, who are the two most recent CEOs of VicForests, and all the staff of VicForests. They have carried out their work to create wealth for Victoria, to generate timber for Victoria, under extreme duress and with no support from a Labor government. They have been sold out by a Labor government, and those workers deserve more. We on this side of the house appreciate what they have done for Victoria. We say thank you very much, and we hope that they actually get the support out of the government they deserve. Because at the moment – and the reasoned amendment from the member for Lowan sets this out – they are not getting the support they deserve. The government made grand promises, but they are slowly crab walking away from them, putting more rules in place so they do not get the support they need: ‘If you’ve done this, you can’t have any money. If you’ve done that, you can’t have any money.’ There are grand announcements typical of Labor, ‘We’ll look after you,’ but then they let the bureaucrats put in place all the rules so you actually cannot get any money or cannot get the money you deserve. It is

an absolute disgrace that a Labor government is selling out the workers and the business owners in the industry by denying them the support that was particularly promised.

Can I also acknowledge the Creswick campus of Melbourne University and all the foresters that have been trained there since 1910 – the great researchers, the scientists. There were scientists that actually understood forestry, actually helped forestry, rather than the purported scientists like David Lindenmayer who have done nothing but trash the industry and put misinformation out there to undermine the credibility of those who actually put real science out there about the timber industry.

I would like to finish off on a key point: a sustainable native timber industry is a carbon sink for the future, and that is what those on the other side of the house actually do not appreciate. We have now got European companies coming to Victoria buying farming land to plant trees to get carbon offset credits back in Europe. Under those rules after 15 years that timber can be harvested and put into a carbon store in the product that is produced and you can grow another crop and you can get another set of carbon credits. If you think about the native timber industry, not only can it provide great timber for all the things that we want, but it can actually be a carbon sink, and that is now gone. To have a carbon sink the trees need to be harvested so the carbon is stored, because a tree after about 35 years does not store as much carbon as it does in those first 35 years of its life, and you have a carbon store for the future. The native timber industry could have been a key part of climate mitigation with carbon storage. That has gone because of the treachery of this particular government.

If you think about the timber products that we will be importing from overseas, we are not going to stop using timber, but we are going to take it from overseas from countries that do not have the standards that we have here in Australia. If you think about paper product – and I do not know about you, Acting Speaker, but I know in my office, now that we cannot get Reflex paper anymore, we are having trouble with our printers – they are having to actually change the printers to handle the lousy quality paper we are importing from overseas, because we no longer have got the good-quality Reflex paper that was done by the proud business in Morwell that actually looked after us all there.

Just to finish off on the misnomers that have been talked about, the member for Lowan, the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, touched on the issue of the Leadbeater's possum. There was a time when people said there were only 200 Leadbeater's possums left in Victoria. There are thousands of Leadbeater's possums in Victoria. There was a myth that they only lived in old-growth forest. They actually live in regrowth. Out of the bushfires we have seen regrowth from the early 2000s, and Leadbeater's possums are found in that regrowth. The misinformation that has been put out about this is absolutely criminal. The long-footed potoroo has been used and the powerful owl – you name it, there has been a native species that has been used to close down timber coupes, particularly in East Gippsland, and it is just not true. They are there. No-one surveys the public estate. Only 6 per cent of our public estate is used for the native timber industry in Victoria. No-one goes out and looks in the other 94 per cent to see what animals are out there and what creatures are out there. They are everywhere in the rest of the public estate.

As I started: vale, the Victorian native timber industry. Those on the other side of the house should hang their heads in shame. No wonder they are happy to truncate this debate. Finding people to stand up over there and justify what they have done in selling out the communities and the workers of this industry is an absolute disgrace.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (11:28): I rise to make a short contribution on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024. Being in government requires making hard decisions – decisions that have an impact and a consequence and indeed change real-life circumstances. What we know and understand on this side of the house is that these decisions need to be based on facts and based in science. The situation that we find ourselves in when it comes to this piece of legislation and the decision contained within it, a decision that has been foreshadowed now for some period of time, is indeed that we know that commercial native timber harvesting is not a sustainable practice, importantly, both for the environment and of course for the workers within the industry.

What we know is that the bill will deliver legislative reforms that support the closure of VicForests and the end of native timber harvesting in state forests – and the intended commencement is from 1 July 2024 to align with the closure on 30 June – specifically, the abolishment of VicForests, the repealing of the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004, the removal of the framework established by that act for authorising and regulating commercial timber harvesting in Victoria’s state forests and the incorporation of those provisions that continue to be relevant for regulating and managing activities within state forests into the Forests Act 1958 and the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987.

What we know is that consistent with what has been foreshadowed previously we have seen a significant increase in those bushfires, which was mentioned earlier by the member for Albert Park, and that prolonged legal action. Critically, a lack of alternative supply has indeed made the *Victorian Forestry Plan* timeline and the transition that was foreshadowed for 2030 unfeasible. We of course know and understand that this decision has significant, real-world, tangible impacts, and that is why, importantly, more than \$200 million in support for workers and their families to transition away from native timber logging was made and on 23 August 2023 the Victorian forestry worker support payment was expanded to increase worker top-up payments from \$120,000 to \$150,000 and to \$200,000 for those workers that are over 45 years old.

There is no doubt that decisions of this magnitude are indeed, and must be, carefully considered. We on this side of the house are not a team to bury our heads in the sand when it comes to making the tough calls and the important decisions that need to be made, and no-one is saying that these are easy matters. But the reality is that industry and the workers in it will not survive, and this situation needed to be addressed before it addressed itself. I commend the bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:32): It is with an exceptionally heavy heart that I rise to speak on this bill before us, which is going to see the demise of the sustainable timber industry in Victoria as we have known it after a very long period of time. I want to thank very much those from VicForests that have done the very hard yards, plus all of those in downstream operations. In my electorate there are so many who were involved in harvest and haulage, in sawmilling, and the businesses that go alongside those that support them, whether that be machinery operators and repairers or fuel providers. It is with a very heavy heart that we are here today.

We know that in Victoria timber harvesting was sustainable. Three trees in every 10,000 were harvested. If people want to think about how quickly forests regrow, they only need to come out to my electorate. In 2009 the Black Saturday fires absolutely decimated the areas around Kinglake, Marysville and Buxton. You go there now and you look at those forests, and you would not know, the bush is so dense – so quickly have they regrown. VicForests have had a very dedicated program to replant and reforest every coupe that they have done, and many of those have been exceptionally successful. Have a look at coupes that were harvested 20 or 30 years ago and you will see how large those trees have grown in that time, because you can reforest. Deforestation is not reforestation, and we certainly have reforestation here.

I want to mention the IPCC’s position on forestry – that is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UN body. Their *Special Report on Climate Change and Land*, chapter 6, outlines very clearly that sustainable forestry has benefits for the environment in terms of carbon capture as young trees absorb more carbon than older trees. As I have said, reforestation is not deforestation, which sees forests chopped down and cleared for good. That is not happening; that did not happen. Carbon lives in our products. Wood construction can store carbon for up to a century.

I want to mention the workers from the industry and what is lost – the expertise and the specialist positions that are lost. There are a range of fields: environmental and forest scientists, ecologists, policy compliance officers, researchers, modellers and analysts. Downstream there are seed collectors; harvest and haulage heavy machinery operators; sawmillers and sharpeners. So many industries, so much expertise, is lost. And for government members to say they will all be there to support bushfire activity in the future – well, if they have sold off their gear, they are not there to do that sort of work.

They have been on the ground. As soon as there are fires, they swing into action because they want to protect their local communities. They have been subject – the workers, whether they are at VicForests or other workers – to some vile actions. They have had on-the-ground activism where people have chained themselves to their gear. The risks to harvesters and haulage are just extraordinary. We had 75 per cent of the coupes on the timber release plan being subject to court action. This was about slowing the industry down, bringing the industry to its knees and putting the pressure on the government for the Greens votes. It was extraordinary to watch this and then to see how the VicForests workers were treated not just by the government but by activists and some departments and organisations, including mainstream media.

They suffered work-related violence – they were abused and threatened, they were vilified and they were battered and bruised – and it has taken its toll. Social media is one of the worst – the dreadful, dreadful slurs and the threats – but they were not allowed to speak out and say ‘This is what the story is.’ They are public servants, and they had to put up with this. They had a directive not to respond. How absolutely heartbreaking and traumatic for these people. I have spoken to very many of them, and they felt very much hamstrung. They have borne the brunt of unfair activity, and to those people I say I am very, very sorry, on behalf of the coalition here, that they had to experience that. That was not fair. And for the Labor government to let it happen and be silent on it I think was extraordinary. They would not do that in any other circumstance. If they had public servants subject to what they were subjected to, the government would have called it out. Well, they did not call it out, and that is just an absolute failure with the heartlessness of this government.

Timber forestry can be done very sustainably, and that was being done. The constant court actions have undermined confidence, and really the work of the environmentalists has not been for good by any means. We see now that they want to extend and close those forests and turn them into national parks, which will have devastating consequences for regional Victoria. This is a very sad day for Victoria.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (11:37): I rise to speak on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024. From the outset I would like to straightaway put down that I recognise the impact to communities and families. I do come from a logging family – a coupe in Noojee. They had their own mill for quite some time. During forest fires I have had quite a bit to do with the owners of the machinery, who came out in very, very dangerous circumstances. Basically, they are the ones that control a fire. It is not water; it is aircraft and machinery.

I think it is really important to recognise the impact that the decision to end commercial native timber harvesting has had on VicForests employees and regional communities as well, where timber harvesting has been prominent, and I thank everyone for their respectful contributions today. I do note the member for Eildon spoke about the way in which people have been treated, and in a lot of ways I totally agree. I come from an area where there were a lot of activists who at one stage, funnily enough, chained themselves to pine trees in the Australian Paper mill harvesting area in Morwell. There was a gentleman, when my parents worked at the AP mill, who was cutting down a tree where an activist had actually put a metal spike in. That disrupted the chain, moving at God knows how many revolutions per minute. The chain came loose and cut this poor bugger’s leg off. So there is a way to do things, and that certainly is not the way.

I must admit, seeing the way some people respond to their advocacy, even in this place, that it is dangerous, it is not respectful and I do not think it makes lasting change. With that, I am going to keep my contribution very short. As I said, I have got a family connection to state forests and harvesting out at Noojee. I have worked alongside forestry contractors and very much enjoyed knowing that they were beside us with their machinery and keeping us safe. With that, I will leave my comments; I know there are other people who would like to speak on this bill. I just wanted to say that I respect that everyone in the house has their opinion on this, but the debate, unlike some of the activities of the activists, has been very respectful.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:40): It gives me no pleasure to rise on a bill that essentially kills an industry, and that is what is happening here today. We are killing an industry that has been in this state for well over 100 years. My predecessor fought for this industry tooth and nail while he was in here – Gary Blackwood – and he fought everyone. He literally fought everyone. He fought weird professors like David Lindenmayer that put out false reports. He fought with Sarah Rees, who did not pay her legal bill and still has not paid her legal bill, and that is part of the problem. This government had an opportunity to fix that, as they did in New South Wales. They had an opportunity to fix the loophole to stop third-party litigation, but they did not do it. You had the likes of Sarah Rees, who was a nuisance the whole way through. She lost the court case, and then the government said, ‘No, no, don’t chase the legal bill.’ What do you think that did? It opened the floodgates to litigation. And that is why it is dead today – because this government did not have the guts to say to VicForests, ‘Chase after that legal bill and make them pay when they’re making false claims against you.’ That is what this government did, and that was the start of the end of this industry. The absolute death of this industry was when they let Sarah Rees get away with her legal bill.

On the wider impact of this – this was a billion-dollar industry to our state, to our economy – think of the jobs that have been lost. Think of your own house. If you have got a set of stairs in your home, it is made out of hardwood – your windows, everything, decking, the whole lot. The government last year said, ‘We govern for all Victorians, except if you’re in the timber industry. We’re not going to govern for that.’

I will just reference the member for Albert Park. Please, do not make the speech that you made in my electorate. It will not go down well. You showed absolutely no respect for the workers in that industry, none at all.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: You are not the one that answers the phone to the people who are struggling now to pay their machines off. They have not been paid, and you have no respect for that industry. It was disgraceful. Right at the moment we have hardworking men and women still waiting to get their payments. The transition payments have not come through. They are paying off machinery. They are still paying bills. They do not have work, and today we kill this industry. It is absolutely disgraceful what this government has done to the timber workers in this state. It is absolutely criminal how they have been treated, and as previous speakers have said before me, the vandalism, the risk they were put at was disgraceful, with no support from government.

This industry has fought tooth and nail. The people in VicForests are good people. They were good people fighting for jobs, fighting for regional communities to have an economy, and those economies are now dying. I am seeing it in my electorate, with less numbers in a kindergarten which is now under threat of closing. That is the wider impact of this decision. This was not governing for all Victorians. This was appeasing the Greens in this term of Parliament so we could get legislation through the upper house. That is what it was. It has been political all along. There has been no support for these workers. Every day I get a phone call from another worker that still has not got their payments, and they are really struggling. As far as I can say – and I am going to end this here – you shafted an industry, and now you have killed it.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (11:44): I rise to contribute on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024. I understand that this is a bill which has sparked a lot of emotion for people in the chamber and acknowledge that there are obviously people out there in this industry who have made a significant contribution and have been dedicated, through VicForests as employees, to the management of our native forests over the past 20 years. So I would like to start by acknowledging all the workers.

I will keep my contribution relatively brief today, so far as to say that I do take comfort that the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action has created approximately 80 new roles to

integrate these activities into its broader forest and bushfire risk management operations. As the member for Monbulk, bushfire risk mitigation is incredibly important, because it is one of the most bushfire-prone places in the world. So knowing that DEECA has taken on 80 new roles gives me some comfort there, and I hope that that assists as well for those who are transitioning out, because transitioning from industries that have got to evolve over time is difficult for people involved, and we acknowledge that. It is not easy. The world is changing. Technology changes. Industries evolve; they do move and they change over time. The free TAFE that we offer as well to allow people to cross-skill, to cross-train, to upskill, is also vitally important. I know that that has been assisting people to get jobs in growing regional industries as well, like construction, agriculture, transport and manufacturing. It is important that we continue that support, which is why we believe in investing in the TAFE system to enable people to find new pathways, because this is difficult for people.

As I said, I will keep my contribution very short to allow others an opportunity to speak. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (11:47): I stand to make some comments on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024. I am ashamed and embarrassed to have been in the Parliament and to be a member of this Parliament that has shut down our native timber industry in Victoria. I know that there are other members on this side that feel the same way. I actually know there are a few members on that side that feel the same way as well, and the former member for Narracan also is very, very passionate about it.

The reason this should not be going ahead and the reason that I support the member for Lowan's reasoned amendment is that this has been a thought bubble process that has been behind the eight ball the whole time. We have got people who are working in the industry who do not have their packages finalised now, as we stand here and end this timber industry. It is an absolute disgrace. They are direct employers, harvest and haulage contractors. We also have down-the-line businesses – the seed collectors, the electricians who service the mills. The down-the-line businesses that government referred to in media releases, saying they would help, have not been spoken to and not been helped.

To show what a thought bubble idea this was, just one of the many examples I could give – I will keep my comments short, because debate is being stifled – is that there was no clear plan on firewood. When I asked the minister about this, the minister said, 'But the public firewood collection season is still open.' There was no understanding at all that our frail, our elderly, our pensioners rely on the native timber industry to get them their firewood – you know, thought bubble processes not thought through in any way, shape or form. To this day not even the basic questions have been answered by ministers, and we have had four of them. It is a revolving door, and none of them have got it over the last four years.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us – read the report; I got that bored at Christmas I read the report – to use hardwood. It is the best carbon-storing building product we can use. Planet Ark's slogan at the moment is 'Do the world some good, build it with wood'. When we have those sorts of agencies telling us to use hardwood as a building product, consumers who want to do the right thing listen. They listen and they say, 'We will build it with wood, because the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has told us to and Planet Ark has told us to.'

We shut down our industry here. The question I want answered is, if someone on that side can stand up, or when these fools come in later and they want to have a talk on this – just one question: where is our hardwood coming from? Consumer demand is going up. I want to know where it is coming from, because we do not have the plantations here. The minister has admitted in this chamber the plantations to transition to hardwood are not there. So is it coming from Borneo, from Indonesia? Is it coming from PNG? Is it going to come from the Amazon? No-one can tell us where it is going to come from. I can almost certainly guarantee that, because we have an industry with some of the strongest oversights in the world, it will be a worse environmental outcome. It will be coming from a jurisdiction or a country that does not have the oversights that we had here in Victoria. So the fantasy that some

suggest that this is a good environmental outcome is so, so wrong. It is just feel-good crap. It is a bad environmental outcome to close down our native timber industry here in Victoria.

As I said earlier, I actually think that if we did not have parties and we were not divided in the chamber, there would probably be more MPs in this place who would support the continuation of the hardwood timber industry, because I have had a lot from that side come to tell me that they do not support it. But because we are bound by party politics, we now have this situation where I think we have got a majority that support it and we have been flipped over to get rid of this industry in Victoria, which is just an appalling decision. I note the members for Monbulk and Frankston were very, very tentative in their commentary, and I note that some others simply do not know what they are talking about. I will always respect personal conversations, but it would be a breath of fresh air if someone stood up over there and actually supported this. I know it will not happen, but I know that there are some that are avoiding talking on this; I know that for a fact. It is a bad decision – it is more than a bad decision, it is an appalling decision – and that is why I support the member for Lowan's reasoned amendment. We should not be passing this bill.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (11:52): Thank you to all the speakers that have been on their feet today. I thank the member for Gippsland East. I think what he is hearing in the voices of this side of the house is respect for the industry and the workers. This is not something that is being gloated over or anything like that. We recognise that this is a serious issue, and so we wish to pay respect to them by speaking seriously on the matter and not having an excess of poetic licence.

I believe that the basics of the bill have been well prosecuted already by those that have gone before, and I acknowledge and agree with what speakers have said regarding the impact on industry and workers. The government has made commitments around support, and so my message would be that if members feel that people in their area are not receiving or have not yet received the support that has been committed, they should absolutely take that up, because the government will fulfil all of its commitments in relation to the transition package. And we would like, I am sure, to work closely with anyone who needs additional support.

Sometimes it can be hard to see, but in the end there will be some benefits from this. I think, for example, of places like Toolangi, which is where my family goes on hot days. It is a beautiful part of the world. We usually go there after lunch in Kinglake. There are towering tree ferns and beautiful shaded virgin forest with a lovely babbling creek. The biodiversity and conservation values that will be protected through this change are something that will benefit local families and local communities in terms of their access to outdoor recreation and local tourist operations as well. We do not yet know how things will happen. For example, in the Buckland Valley, where my family goes camping a lot, some of the campsites are named after the former Chinese goldminers that were there, because previously that was a goldmining area – that was the industry. Now that is history, so we see that the transition of industry happens over time.

The changes that we see certainly will not be purely positive for everybody, but there will be certainly some positives gained from this in terms of biodiversity and conservation as well as our ability to enjoy the great outdoors. The sourcing of hardwoods through commercial plantations will continue and will expand, so the hardwood will be available for people and for companies to use in the way that it has been previously. Again, I thank the workers for their dedication and their championing of their industry, and I commend the bill to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (11:56): What a dark day. Today is an absolutely dark day with this Allan Labor government killing off the timber industry. It is absolutely hypocrisy of the highest order to hear the Labor government members talk about the workers and seek to pay tribute to the workers. They are doing anything but. They are absolutely cutting down timber workers. These are public sector employees in many cases, government employees, and this government has done everything to cut down timber workers. They should be absolutely ashamed. The workers at VicForests actually really care about the environment and have demonstrated that through their work,

and you only have to read their annual reports to see how sustainable this industry is. This is a sustainable timber industry. It is the most sustainable industry. It actually helps to reduce emissions. It contributes positively to the effects of climate change. These are the workers who, when we have times of emergency and bushfire, are the first to put the community before themselves, to go out and support our communities, utilise the machinery that they are so expert at using to help keep communities safe and help make firebreaks and protect property and lives and livelihoods. Yet this Labor government has systematically, drastically and shamefully killed off this industry and is cutting down these timber workers. We should be doing everything possible to support this vital industry – such a sustainable, critical industry and something Victoria has been proud of for well over a hundred years. We should not be introducing laws to kill it off, but that is precisely what this Labor government is doing. It is absolutely disgusting.

So many people in my community work in this industry. They will be losing their jobs and livelihoods. They have got to now make changes purely because of the disgraceful policy of the Labor Party. And it is not just those who are timber workers; there is a massive ripple effect for all of the communities who are going to be directly impacted. Think about the local shops, the local cafes, the schools and the kinders; all of these will be completely devastated and impacted. You will see people leaving these townships. These beautiful townships in Victoria will probably become desolate, because people will have to leave to find work elsewhere, and it is all at the hands of this Labor government.

I will hazard a guess, but I might be the only member of this Parliament who actually has family with a native timber farm. My family actually has a native timber plantation, and we do that because we have regenerated sheep farming land and actually put a native plantation in. We know how important the carbon sequestration is. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been talked about already today, and it actually advocates for a sustainable native timber industry. So it just absolutely beggars belief – it is just mind-boggling – that this Labor government which bangs on about climate change is doing the very thing that is killing off an industry that actually contributes positively to our climate.

Where is this timber going to come from? Indonesia? Borneo? It is not sustainable there. That is impacting wildlife over in those countries. It is completely unsustainable, and it is absolutely disgraceful that that is where we have come to under this government. Manufacturing is going to be impacted. Native forest products in homes, in construction and in art are not going to be able to be used because this Labor government has killed off this industry. Labor promised to secure the future of these timber workers. It is astonishing that Labor come out and try to have a headline and paint it as a positive that they are trying to secure the future – they are killing off the future for these timber workers. They have failed to secure proper compensation for these workers, which is why I support the reasoned amendment by the member for Lowan in terms of making sure that we can secure the compensation. But we should not have ever got to this point because we should have done everything to support this industry and keep it alive, to support these workers and to support the great economic contribution that this industry provides to the state of Victoria. All Labor has done is kill it off, and it is a disgrace.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:01): It is with great sadness that I rise to speak on this legislation today. The day the government decided to shut down Victoria's native timber industry was a very sad day for the people of Victoria and indeed probably the start of the end of the once great blue-collar worker Labor Party. It is a symbol that the government has given up on the blue-collar worker and on the people that get out and harvest timber, drive the trucks, take it to the mills and process the timber and on many others in downstream industries as well that were once the heart and soul of the Labor Party in many respects – the F in the CFMEU. Yet this government turned its back on them in 2019 and has absolutely destroyed the industry ever since. Previous speakers have made it clear that the native timber industry in Victoria is a sustainable, renewable resource and one that provides jobs in our regions, industries in our towns and timber for our building sector. In a time of a

housing availability and affordability crisis, to be shutting down one of the sources of the materials for that sector is just bizarre.

We have heard from previous speakers about the issues of sustainability. I would like to go to that, particularly in relation to climate change. Some members of the government, and absolutely those people up the back who call themselves Greens, will tell you that this industry is bad and contributes to climate change. Well, do not take it from me – take it from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Chapter 9 of its 2019 report stated:

... a sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit ...

That is what the IPCC said about a sustainable timber industry, which we had in Victoria. The simple fact is that trees grow back. You cut them down and the carbon does not disappear into the ether. It is here. It is here in this timber, here in this chamber. The carbon stays locked up. And what happens? You grow a new tree. And what do those new trees do? They capture carbon. For the Greens and some of the members of the government – I am only saying some of them because we know there are plenty over there that actually support this industry – to say that this is a bad industry for climate change is just the opposite of understanding the science. It is the opposite of good management of our environment, and it is the opposite of good deals for our economy.

I would like to thank and acknowledge all those people who worked at VicForests, the organisation that is being shut down by this legislation. I want to thank the VicForests employees – actual government employees – and their contractors, particularly the harvest and haul contractors, who have mostly been put out of work, or the work that they have usually done in this, and indeed all the workers in the timber industry, whether downstream in the haulage sector, in the mills or in the downstream industries utilising that timber, for their work over the years. I want to thank them for being stewards of our environment – notwithstanding all the stories that we have heard from particularly the left-wing media, saying repeatedly and often erroneously that they have been damaging the environment when they have not.

I am not saying they have got it perfect every time. But I thank VicForests in particular, and I thank those in senior management, who have done their best in the face of very difficult circumstances where for the past 10 years they have not once had a minister or a Premier who would defend them – not once has a minister gone out and defended VicForests and said, ‘They are doing what the government of the day wants them to do, they are looking after our forests, they are producing timber for our communities.’ Not once have they had that support, yet this organisation have been subject to some of the most aggressive lawfare of any organisation, certainly in the state of Victoria.

We have the green NGOs, the Greens political party and some in Labor who say, ‘The industry’s not sustainable; VicForests keeps losing money.’ It has lost money because it has had to spend tens of millions of dollars defending itself from lawfare. I will add the finding from the Auditor-General in his report in 2013 that VicForests does not receive subsidies. Yet those up there – the member for Melbourne – and those across there and those out there who would shut this industry down have been saying for years that it is subsidised by the taxpayer. It has not been subsidised by the taxpayer – the Auditor-General found that – and it has been subject to this lawfare, which has made it virtually insolvent because of the costs, and not once have we seen a Labor government minister go out and defend VicForests.

On the contrary, as the member for Narracan said, when My Environment lost a case against the government and against VicForests and were awarded \$1.2 million in costs against them, what happened? Did they pay it? No, they did not pay it. Indeed it blew out to at least \$2 million in interest costs, and yet the government turned a blind eye. So on the one hand you had VicForests suffering this lawfare to shut it down, to increase the costs on VicForests and the timber industry, and the government did nothing; and on the other side when one of the environmental groups gets \$1 million

in costs awarded against them, we just turn a blind eye – we do not worry about that. How disgraceful of this government. That money was owed to the people of Victoria but for base political reasons the Labor government chose not to pursue it.

And we have seen throughout this process the government chopping and changing. The member for Lowan did an exceptional job in outlining the timeline that we have seen with this industry and how the government has chopped and changed its views. First they said, ‘We’re going to transition to plantation timber’. It took them six years to do anything with \$110 million allocated in the 2017 budget. They did not do anything with it. The government took six years to actually start planting some plantation timber, which of course was never going to replace us by 2030. Then in 2019 the government came out and said, ‘We’ll shut down the industry by 2030.’ So the industry started to plan for that; they started to make allowances. In particular the mills started to work out how they were going to survive without the supply of native timber. That did not happen because we had this decision in 2023: ‘No, sorry – we’re going to bring it forward by six years.’ And now ministers on the other side, including the Minister for Energy and Resources, had the gall in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings last week to say, ‘It’s not our decision to shut down the native timber industry; it was the courts.’ Well, that is absolutely false. As the member for Lowan pointed out, the government had the opportunity, just as New South Wales did, to legislate to minimise this third-party legal action that was attacking the timber industry, and they chose not to do it. I was the one that asked the Premier at the time last year, ‘Have you got legal advice? Why did you not take legal action to shut down this loophole?’ ‘We’ve got legal advice that we can’t do it’, said Daniel Andrews. And when I asked him for it, what did he say? ‘I can’t show you that, it’s legal confidentiality’ – so effectively ‘Trust me.’ It is just rubbish.

I now see the changes to the Gippsland landscape and the Gippsland economic landscape since I came into Parliament, which happens to coincide with this government being in power. You come across the hill at Hernes Oak and you look out to the blank space where Hazelwood power station used to be, and that saddens me every time. We knew it was going to close eventually, but it was brought forward by this government. And now we are seeing fewer and fewer native timber trucks on the road, and the absolutely extraordinarily stupid thing that we are seeing – the native timber trucks that you are seeing on the road these days are coming off the ferry from Tasmania. Indeed you are also seeing trucks bringing in timber from the United States to go into the mill at Heyfield. How do you reckon that is going for the emissions? How good is that for the environment, to be importing it from the United States instead of sustainably harvesting that timber right here in Gippsland and in Victoria? It is an absolute disgrace.

This government stands condemned for shutting down this industry, and I believe it will rue the day. We are already seeing that those blue-collar workers in the west and north are waking up to the Labor Party abandoning them, and it will continue.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (12:11): I would like to make a brief contribution on this today. From the outset I do want to acknowledge the really significant impact that this legislation has on forestry workers and their communities, and I understand that the transition of this industry is undeniably a very, very difficult thing for all those who have been impacted.

I have been listening to the contributions in the chamber today from my colleagues, and I do want to note the respectful debate that we have been having and also the passion of so many members in this place for their local communities and supporting their local communities, particularly those forestry communities, with this transition. In particular I did note the member for Narracan’s passion in standing up for his community, and while we may disagree on many things, I think the thing that we all in this place have in common is that we are all here to stand up for our communities.

I do want to thank the workers, the forestry workers and VicForests, for their patience and their resilience in confronting this. I appreciate there have been many challenges along the way, including this transition being brought forward. The Lara electorate is not home to a forestry community – that

is not something that has been part of our community for a long time – but we are home to the port, and the timber and woodchip coming through the port are a big part of our local economy. So in a way it does have an impact on our community in Geelong, like so many other rural and regional communities.

I know that other people want to make a contribution on this legislation, so as I mentioned, I will keep my contribution short, and I will end my remarks here. Again, I just want to acknowledge the impact that this has on forestry workers and on forestry communities across rural and regional Victoria.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:13): I also rise to speak on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024. This bill does two things: it repeals the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004 so as to formally end commercial native forest timber harvesting and abolishes VicForests and returns forest management responsibilities to the government. I understand also that this is an issue that is very strongly felt across the chamber, and I respect the members of this Parliament who have come here and put those views.

I came from the forest movement. I spent my entire life working to protect our environment and to protect our climate, and I bring that into this Parliament. I am also here to represent a very large group of Victorians who have also spent their lives fighting to protect our native species and the habitat that they call home and also trying to protect the climate from the emissions that these activities produce.

Jade Benham interjected.

Ellen SANDELL: I acknowledge that the member for Mildura just said ‘Oh my God’, but I think we do need to have this debate respectfully across the chamber, and all members have a right to come into this place and share their views on something that is a really big reform and a very important issue for so many Victorians.

When Labor announced that it was finally abolishing VicForests, it was about time. The Nationals need to realise that although this is an industry that they have been backing for a long time, it is an industry that is no longer sustainable in any sense of the word. VicForests was a cowboy company that logged, burnt and destroyed some of the most precious and carbon-dense native forest habitat in the entire world, which exists here in Victoria. We are so fortunate to have these incredible forests here in Victoria, yet we were destroying them at an incredible pace – many, many MCGs per day. It was a company that was losing money for years, even before the court cases, a company with terrible environmental performance, as outlined in many Auditor-General reports, and a company that was found to be engaging in illegal activity. VicForests threatened countless species’ survival. They pushed our faunal emblem here in Victoria, the Leadbeater’s possum, to the brink of extinction. They pushed greater gliders to the brink of extinction.

Let us be clear about what actually happened to this wood once it was logged. The vast majority of it ended up being used to make cheap woodchips, pallets and paper. The member for Gippsland South in his contribution talked about the fact that our forests were logged to make wood like what exists here in this chamber and that that stores carbon – not true. It is actually not true. If you look at the exact science, if we actually care about good science in this place – I think that this chamber and all of our parliamentarians should rely on good science – we should rely on an evidence base. Let us look at the science. The science says that when you log a native forest only 3 per cent of the biomass ends up in high-grade timber products that can store carbon. The vast, vast majority ends up going into the atmosphere once you log – just debris left on the ground that degrades and then is turned into emissions. And the vast majority of what is taken out of the forest –

A member interjected.

Ellen SANDELL: This is not me; this is peer-reviewed science that says this. It is peer-reviewed science from one of our most respected universities. If you would like to dispute the peer-reviewed science of one of our most respected universities, you can take that up with that university and the

academic community. The vast majority of the biomass that is taken out of a forest ends up as woodchips, cheap pallets and paper. Paper does not store carbon; paper degrades in a short period of time. I remember meeting a representative of VicForests when I was at one of the international climate conferences, and the evidence that she showed me that logging stores carbon was that they found an old newspaper that still existed from a few decades ago. She said, 'Look, we made paper and this newspaper still exists. Someone has kept this newspaper. Look, it's storing carbon' – one newspaper. Well, actually the vast majority of paper degrades into emissions into the atmosphere. Only 3 per cent ends up as high-grade product. If we want to talk about science, let us actually use proper, peer-reviewed science.

VicForests was even found to have illegally spied on ordinary citizens, citizens who had the gall to keep an eye on VicForests and what they were doing – something that the government refused to do. These were ordinary citizens who were keeping VicForests to account, and then VicForests hired private investigators to go and spy on them – not activities of a trustworthy organisation. In the absence of government or VicForests actually obeying the laws that they were required to obey, citizen scientists, environment groups and lawyers, all inspired by a love of these ecosystems, actually had to go out and do the work of surveying for threatened species, which VicForests was legally required to do but was not doing. They had to go out and prove that endangered species existed and that VicForests was acting illegally and then take that to court. I think that all Victorians owe a great debt to these groups for volunteering their time for literally decades and for putting themselves and their bodies on the line, whether that is through direct action, citizen science or legal means, to protect something that belongs to all Victorians and our kids and grandkids. I want to put some of those groups on the record, because they have done incredible work over a huge amount of time: the Victorian Forest Alliance, Environmental Justice Australia, the Victorian National Parks Association, Wildlife of the Central Highlands, Friends of the Earth, My Environment, Forest Conservation Victoria, the Wilderness Society, the Wombat Action Group, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum and all the scientists, the barristers and everyone else who have committed their lives to protecting something so precious. We will look back on them and we will thank them.

In response this government has tried to stop activists and citizen scientists from doing this work. This government even passed laws to ban people entering timber harvest zones – \$21,000 fines people were risking. But even after all this, these community groups were vindicated. VicForests was found to be doing illegal activity, and after decades and decades of work from local community members, Labor was finally forced to admit what we had known for a long time – that logging simply could not continue. It was not compatible with our climate targets, it was not compatible with our goals to protect the environment and it was not financially sustainable. There was no wood left, and Labor was finally forced to stop native forest logging.

Labor then promised as part of this, and we have the press releases to prove it, to turn these forests into reserves, to protect them for all Victorians – for our kids and grandkids to go into the bush and experience these places and enjoy them in perpetuity and for traditional owners to be able to manage these landscapes, making sure that they have the right to the landscapes and the country that is their right. The government also gave about a billion dollars to workers and logging contractors to transition them to plantations, because we need to realise that workers have that right to be transitioned into new industries or to take packages. We have no beef with the workers who have been doing these jobs over many years; they deserve support as well. But this government gave them that support – nearly a billion dollars of that support.

But it seems that old habits die hard, because you would think that Labor after all of these decisions would simply cut the cord and say, 'Okay, logging is over. Let's refocus the environment department on restoring these forests, ensuring traditional owners can have ownership over what happens there, protect the damaged forests with specialist staff who've got these skills and then move to plantations for our softwood and hardwood needs.' But seven months into the end of native forest logging it is clear that this culture of destruction has actually not ended with the end of VicForests. A lot of this

culture has simply been rehoused by moving the same people, the same contractors and the same culture into the department and into Forest Fire Management Victoria.

Two weeks ago Forest Fire Management Victoria, or FFMV, killed an endangered – a critically endangered, I should say, the highest level of endangerment – greater glider while creating fuel breaks in the Yarra Ranges National Park. This is not just a state forest, this is actually a protected national park. The Labor minister and the department were informed well ahead of time by citizens and locals in that area who were taking on the surveying work the department should have been doing. The department and the minister were actively told that critically endangered greater gliders lived in the trees they were about to fell, and doing anything that threatens the life of a listed species is actually in contravention of the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Yet FFMV carried on and those groups were fobbed off, and now the greater glider has been killed.

Last Friday we saw that play out exactly the same way. Contractors under the cover of darkness fenced off an area of the national park and knocked down an ancient grandmother tree, a hollow-bearing giant. It was not a fire risk, as the science shows, but now it has been cut down it will be a fire risk, because it will be replaced by something smaller and more flammable. This ancient hollow-bearing grandmother tree was felled because FFMV just could not be bothered to look at another route for their firebreak, talk to an expert or even check their science. In fact they are not even required to do any surveying for threatened species before they log. Tragically, this looks like it is just the start of logging 2.0. So we support the government officially abolishing VicForests, but we cannot allow it to just exist in another form. FFMV can still continue to do its crucial work of reseedling native forests and protecting them, fire prevention where the science demands it and cleaning up areas that might be a public safety risk, but it cannot and should not do it completely unsupervised without any regard for the environmental effects of that –

Steve Dimopoulos: It doesn't do that.

Ellen SANDELL: Well, it does – let alone for commercial purposes. The Minister for Environment is interjecting and saying that FFMV does not do that, and I would love to have a meeting with him to discuss this, because on our understanding and everything we have seen on the ground FFMV does not do the environmental surveying before it goes in. If that is not the case, I would love to have a conversation with the minister about that.

The Greens will be seeking three very sensible, responsible amendments to this bill, and we urge everyone to support them. We will move them in the other place, but I would be happy to make them available to members before this bill comes to that other place. First, we want to see FFMV embed strong, transparent ecological reporting and harm minimisation practices into their bushfire prevention works and their storm clean-up and debris clean-up works to make sure that if we are creating a fuel break it is not through hollow-bearing trees that are full of critically endangered animals. I am sure that everyone could agree that that is a sensible thing not to do. Our first amendment would require agreements and arrangements under section 62C of the Forests Act 1958, which relates to the prevention and suppression of fires and recovery from fires, to include ecological assessments where works impact or are likely to impact threatened and endangered species and to demonstrate that the department has given proper consideration to and ensured that operations are in accordance with all action statements available for the 117 forest-dependent species listed under our own endangered species law, the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

Secondly, we want to empower the EPA and the Office of the Conservation Regulator to investigate ecological impacts from those fire-related, storm debris clean-up or safety management activities and make appropriate recommendations, because currently works undertaken by the department cannot actually be investigated by the conservation regulator even when they are known to threaten critically endangered species. Even VicForests, as poor as their performance and culture were, theoretically had some level of accountability and oversight and requirement to do ecological surveys. But FFMV, as part of the same department as the OCR, has none of that. Our next amendment would give

investigatory powers to the EPA as well as the OCR, given that the OCR actually currently sits in the same department as FFMV, to ensure that investigations are done at arm's length and done properly. We would also, while it is not within the scope of this bill, encourage Labor to consider moving the Office of the Conservation Regulator from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to another department, perhaps the Department of Justice and Community Safety or elsewhere, so that we stop getting the same old 'DEECA can't investigate DEECA' excuse.

Our third amendment is to ban the sale of timber collected from these works being sold commercially. This is because we believe that so much of what is driving this fuel break work, salvage logging or storm debris clean-up is not the need for these works or the driver of public safety but actually the commercial drive from timber mills, some of which are owned by this government, and the logging industry, who want free wood from our native forests to feed their mills to sell to make woodchips, paper and sheet pallets. These mills have received free wood from our public forests for decades, and they do not want that to end. If we cut off this commercial driver, hopefully any work done in our forests will be because it is actually needed for safety or ecological reasons informed by scientific research and community safety, not because the logging industry wants to make a quick buck. These are three perfectly reasonable, moderate reforms which any government that claims to want to save threatened species and protect against bushfires should want to support.

While we are talking about science, I mentioned before the science of carbon storage in forests, but we also need to look at the science of how to prevent fires. We all want to do everything we can to prevent bushfires and prevent the danger from bushfires, but the latest peer-reviewed science shows that actually logging a forest makes it more fire-prone. It might seem counterintuitive, but think of it like this: big, old trees are often not the ones that are burning. It is the younger trees that are more fire-prone. When you take out a big, old tree, you open up the canopy, which allows more wind and actually fuels the fire even more. So while the member for Gippsland South says, 'Oh, it's fine, we can log forests; they'll regrow,' (a) actually we lose heaps of carbon in that process, which takes hundreds of years to recapture – that is what the science says – and (b) it make those forests more fire-prone, as you have lots of twiggy trees, smaller trees and big open canopies, which actually fuel more fire. So if we do want to protect people from fire, which I hope that everyone in this place would like to do, let us look at the real science that says that old, wet forests burn much less hot and much less frequently than these forests that have been logged. Also, putting in logging roads opens up routes for people to go in and light fires and opens up wind tunnels and all of that, which adds to fires as well.

Finally, I would like to put on record my disappointment that the minister has refused our requests for this bill to go into a consideration-in-detail stage. The consideration-in-detail stage is the stage where we are supposed to get answers and we are able to ask lots of questions of the minister – it is an important method of transparency and accountability – but this government refuses to do that, to avoid scrutiny. We requested that this bill go into consideration in detail a while ago, and it was refused at the last minute. We have got a lot of questions we would like to ask about this bill even though we are supporting it.

We would like to ask: will the new iteration of logging under FFMV once VicForests is abolished actually be subject to any environmental laws? Why are they flouting their current responsibilities under current laws? We would like to ask where the nearly \$1 billion of taxpayer money – money from every worker in the state, I must say; every worker has chipped in to give the logging industry \$1 billion – has gone and how it is being spent. It was supposed to be spent to move loggers out of native forests into plantations, but what has actually happened is it seems like a lot of the industry has just taken that money and moved their operations to Tasmania, where they are logging endangered species habitat, or now they have just taken jobs in the department to log in our national parks. Where has that billion dollars gone? Is that a good use of taxpayer funds – to just give loggers money to continue to do their work? We now know that the government is selling those logs from those national parks, which are supposed to be legally protected from logging.

We have got a lot of questions that need answers, but this Labor government does not want to answer them. It is disappointing, but we will take these up with the government in the upper house. On that, I would like to commend the bill to the house and commend the final nail in the coffin of VicForests, an organisation that should have been shut down a very, very long time ago. I look forward to continuing discussions with the government and everyone else in this place about supporting our very sensible amendments.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (12:32): I rise to make a very, very brief contribution on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024. It is one of those bills that comes to this place that just demonstrates that the job we have as a government is not easy. We have got to be here for the difficult decisions, and this really is one of the difficult decisions. I believe it to be the right decision for all sorts of reasons – the environment is one. There are a few other realities as well that we have to face. I do think, however, that right now our first thought has to be with the workers associated with this industry.

I do take issue with the way the leader of the Greens ended her contribution using language like ‘final nail in the coffin’. That is not appropriate today, because we need to make sure that we continue to look after workers who are transitioning or who have transitioned out of this industry and assist them with the continuing transition – and this government has done that. At the very least I think this legislation provides the certainty that these workers have not had for many, many years. This government has provided more than a billion dollars in support for the transition, and that includes a number of different initiatives, particularly for native timber workers – redundancy payments, relocation payments, recognition of prior learning, community forestry hardship payments, one-on-one case management and training support. Victoria of course has a very substantial free training program. It is fair to say that through this process the government is case managing workers into employment. It is appropriate that we do everything we can to ensure that workers in the timber industry continue to enjoy the dignity of work. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:35): I rise today – and it gives me no pleasure to rise – to speak on this bill on shutting down the timber industry. That is exactly what it is. The real people that will feel the impact of this today are the workers throughout my region in the Latrobe Valley and through Gippsland and around regional Victoria that are in the timber industry. I note that the member for Melbourne stood up before talking about how bad the timber industry is and the impacts – with white paper. If you want to talk the talk, walk the walk. Do not come in here with white paper and read off that to talk to us about bad things about the timber industry. I find that a real kick in the guts to everyone in my community. The white paper manufacturing industry being shut down – since I have become a member – is just a disgrace. We are now getting white paper coming in from overseas and – I note that the Leader of the Nats stood up before – we are now starting to have issues with our printers that do not accept this white paper.

It is just one of the on-flow effects that are not thought about. Sometimes we do not think about the wider impacts that are going to happen. But to come in here and talk for 15 to 20 minutes off pieces of white paper and try and tell us how bad this is I think is hypocritical of a party. I state that it is the Greens that are actually shutting down this timber industry through being activists up in the timber industry and putting mums’ and dads’ lives at risk by what they are doing in protesting about the timber industry. Coming in here, talking and walking out and not listening to how it is affecting and impacting our regions is just a disgrace.

There has been some very respectful talk in the chamber today from those opposite, and I am 100 per cent sure that they are feeling the pressure from people that live in their seats that are impacted by the closure of the timber industry. We have heard the member for Gippsland East and the member for Gippsland South talk about the impacts that it is going to have in their communities – to the point where in far East Gippsland the consequences are that it is virtually going to shut down timber towns. I do not understand that. You do not get that back. Once people leave, it is very hard to get them back into these timber towns. We lose not only the people that are in the coupes cutting the trees down and

putting them on their trucks. There is a stat – from when I spoke to people in the Latrobe Valley that have logging trucks that run up and down: there are 100 associated jobs with every single truck that runs up and down the roads. You see the amount of timber trucks that run up and down the road; well there are up to 100 jobs associated with every single truck. They are the on-flow effects that we do see and we do feel down in Gippsland.

As I said before, the closure of the timber industry is going to have a detrimental effect on those timber towns up in far East Gippsland, and we do feel for them. It is schools that are going to be shut, it is kindergartens that are going to be shut and it is services that are going to be shut. These people that live up there – if they choose to stay – have been told they can transition. Well, we are not transitioning out of the timber industry. The timber industry has been shut. That is what has happened. We use the word ‘transition’. It is being shut. It is being closed. These people want to work in the industry. They love the bush. They love the environment. That is what they do. They are the keepers that actually make sure that the forest industry can be enjoyed by everybody.

The member for Melbourne said that we do not want to have access roads in there because people drive in there and start fires. Well, I am telling her: people that want to start bushfires could not give a rat’s clacker about a road being there to drive in on. They are going to walk in there regardless. We have all these bloody Leadbeater’s possums and other animals that are in there that are going to be locked up in these areas. The only thing that is going to happen and the only thing we can guarantee by locking up the bush and locking up the forest is that it will burn. We are protecting, supposedly, all these species of animals in these areas, and it is going to burn. That is the number one thing that we know.

We have only got to go back a few years to the horrendous fires that ripped through Gippsland East all the way to Mallacoota. My daughter was holidaying up at Mallacoota in those fires, and who were at the forefront putting their lives on the line and putting their machinery on the line because they had the technology and they had the actual bush smarts to know where the fire was going? These people not only act where the fire is going; they know hours before the wind changes. So they can get there and make a concerted effort to stop the bushfire impacting communities – and these are the people that we are pushing out of the industry. I see that the government at one stage was talking about how there will be bulldozers and people that will come out of Melbourne to protect us. That is honourable, but if they do not know the landscape of what they are dealing with, if they do not know how fire acts, all we are doing is putting people that are trying to defend us in harm’s way.

It is a double-edged sword that we have shut the timber industry down. It is meant to save the environment. It is meant to help with packages that the government has put up for compensation. Well, where is the compensation? It looks great on a piece of paper. It sounds fantastic when a minister from Labor stands up and says, ‘We have these things in place.’ Well, I talk to the people that are involved in the industry in the Latrobe Valley that have worked there for generations. They have seen no compensation. All they have is roadblocks. Every single time they have roadblocks to accessing this compensation. It is unfair, it is unjust and it is just downright wrong that these people that have served us for years and years and years – generations – that have worked in the timber industry are going to feel the brunt. I am sure that people up in far East Gippsland that have been in timber mills really do not want free TAFE to move into another area that may be there. They want jobs on the ground so they can feed their families, keep them safe and put a roof over their head by using the timber that they are cutting down that goes into their houses.

It is renewable. Others have talked in the chamber about carbon capture – some of the waffle that just came out some particular members’ mouths as we have been standing up in here. They say it is scientific, but I think they are scientists that just do not know what is going on. I really do think that. They are just reading facts off a sheet, ticking a box: ‘This is what I’m reading. This must be it.’ Come down, talk to the people that you are actually affecting on the ground, the people that have to put their house on the line now because they cannot afford to pay for the machinery that they were made to buy because they thought, ‘We can transition out of the timber industry. 2030 has been told, so we can

work to that.' Then, bang, the government came in and said, 'You are done. We don't care that you've put in millions and millions of dollars to jump through hoops so we can extend your contract into the next phase of the timber industry.' This is wrong. This is unjust. This is one of the reasons I stood, so I could protect the workers in my electorate and in the electorates running right through East Gippsland. I do not commend the bill to the house. This is an absolute disgrace that this is happening, and I am going to protect my workers. For goodness sake, government, come up with the money to make sure they can survive.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:45): At the outset of my brief contribution on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024 I want to acknowledge the impassioned contributions of many across the house, in particular the member for Morwell, the member for Gippsland East, the member for Gippsland South and the member for Narracan, who are I think very strong representatives of their communities and have a deep insight into the implications of this bill for their communities and the jobs that are going to be lost as a consequence of forestry transition and the loss of VicForests. Also, at the outset I want to acknowledge timber workers and VicForests for their stewardship of our forests. I remember living in Gippsland, in Sale, a number of years ago, and in towns like Maffra, Heyfield, Rosedale and others the impact and contribution of the timber industry was so visible, where often family-owned enterprises employed a lot of people. It is people like that that I am conscious of when I make my contribution today.

Economic transition and change are ever present, but to seek to accelerate that, to seek to derive glee from the loss of other people's jobs and the economic vitality of communities as the Greens have done – they come in here, they run out straight away again; they have not had the courage of their convictions to stay and own their contributions.

James Newbury interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: The Manager of Opposition Business can have his say in due course. I am going to have mine now.

The wilful arrogance, the hubris and the sanctimony, as the member for Morwell eloquently put it, to talk from pieces of paper about the lack of worth of paper and of a timber industry I think takes some hide. But then again, the resource-free, fantasy economics of the Greens – I am not going to call them undergraduate; that would be a disparagement to economic undergraduates all over the world. But as I said, the transition of economies has always been with us. The member for Yan Yean very eloquently talked about looking back at some of the impacts of gold coming and going in Victoria in her electorate. But the package that has been put in place is an important one, so for the Leader of the Greens to come in here and to begrudge the investment that has been made in timber communities to seek to support timber workers to retrain to access the jobs that are so important I think is deeply shameful.

In concluding this very brief contribution, I would like to acknowledge those who have spoken on behalf of their communities. I think the contribution of the Greens on this bill, as with so many, has been deeply disappointing, and I look forward to further contributions.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:48): When I grew up, the Labor Party stood for something. When I got involved in politics, as much as it pains me to say it, the Labor Party actually stood for something, and they would often talk about the fact that they stood for workers. Well, today shows there is nothing left in the values that once underpinned the Labor Party. The Labor Party stand for nothing. 15,000 workers – that does not include the towns, that does not include the community –

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member for Brighton seems to be not really speaking on the bill at all.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I ask the member for Brighton to come back to the bill.

James NEWBURY: I am speaking to the heart of the bill, Acting Speaker. 15,000 workers and their associated businesses, families and communities are being destroyed because of this state government. That is what has happened – a government who have gone silent on the fact that all of these people are having their livelihoods destroyed. Have you seen one single member get up and speak on behalf of these communities, on behalf of these workers? No, you have not seen any. In fact you have seen fakeness coming out of the government when they talk, around attacks they are making on other parties in this place and their opposition to that what the government is proposing. Seriously, talk about blame shifting. It is outrageous that the government is coming in here and causing such destruction because of base ideology. And you see it on gas, you see it on the lock-up of forests – all these issues are policy decisions that have been made purely on ideology. But what this bill does is put the final closure to an industry of good Victorians. It is more than shameful, it is an absolute disgrace that we stand here debating. We have got a government who has put forward a bill in this place to say 15,000 people do not get a job: ‘Fifteen thousand people, you no longer have a job, and we will be happy about it. We will put this bill forward.’ The government should be ashamed of themselves.

Richard Riordan interjected.

James NEWBURY: I am asked by the member for Polwarth what the trade-off was. I am sure there has been a trade-off. The CFMEU have been very, very quiet, haven’t they? They have also had preferred deals when it comes to other bigger government contracts. We can all see that. We know what dirty deals and sellouts have come from this government.

But for the government to move a bill forward to destroy a group of people and their communities – how can they even have the face to get up and speak on it? No wonder they are speaking for 2 minutes. I challenge any member on that side to say a single thing in support of these good people. That shows the truth of what has become of this state government – a government with no values, with no principles. That is what this bill is about, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

What we do now know is that communities have seen it. Communities now see what has become of the once – I hate saying it – great Labor Party. Communities now see it. They know, and you can see how strongly they are shifting away from Labor, who once stood up for them. They once stood up for them, and now they will not – of course they will not.

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member for Brighton seems to be speaking a lot about the Labor Party and not referring to the bill at hand.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member for Brighton to continue but to refer to the bill, please.

James NEWBURY: Of course. That is exactly what I am doing, Acting Speaker. I am talking about a bill that has been moved by the Labor government – a Labor government who have forgotten thousands of workers, forgotten about communities – and aren’t they ashamed to be hearing the truth. I have not heard a single one of them get up on their behalf. It is outrageous. I know how many people on this side of the chamber are speaking on behalf of those people who do not have the voice that they deserve. But we are speaking on their behalf – on behalf of everybody who has not got a voice and does not have a job, does not have security and rightly has concerns about their future. What this government has done is outrageous, and every single member who votes for and speaks on behalf of this should stand condemned. The government have an opportunity to hear these words, to hear these pleas, and do something about it. I would hope that in good conscience some of them go to their leadership, who have forgotten the community, and lobby them to see some sense.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (12:54): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:54): This is outrageous; this is absolutely outrageous. I had just spoken about the fact that there are so many members of this place who want to speak on this bill and

called on the government to have the guts to speak on behalf of these communities, and what is the first thing the government do? They move that the debate be adjourned. They guillotine, they gag this debate. Of course they are ashamed to speak on this bill, and you can see it. They were so ashamed that the mirror was held up in front of them that the second that it was held up to their faces they moved a guillotine. What a disgraceful move by this government. The coalition will oppose this disgraceful guillotine.

I do note that an agreement was reached that our members would have an opportunity to speak until the lunchbreak, and the government has broken that agreement. It is absolutely outrageous to think that the government would break an agreement to allow people to speak on a bill. How could that be? Two hours of debate – you are talking about 15,000 people and their livelihoods. People are sitting across on the other side of the chamber smirking. This is not funny. This motion just proves –

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business has impugned members on this side. No-one is smirking other than at his antics.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member for Brighton to bring the tone down a little bit. You are very loud.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I will ask the member for Malvern to not call out when I am in the chair. I will respond to the point of order made by the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and say that the member for Brighton can continue with the procedural debate that is underway.

James NEWBURY: I do note that the minister did not in any way call a point of order on whether or not I was speaking on the procedural debate.

This motion – this gag motion, this guillotine – just proves the point that was made in the contribution I made just prior to it being moved. It proves that the government want to hide the fact that they are destroying so many people's lives. That is what they are doing, and they are so ashamed that they have moved a motion to stop debate. I look forward to hearing from the next government speaker as to why this bill should not be debated, and every single member on their side that gets up to speak on why this bill should not be debated will stand condemned – every single one of them. So we look forward to every single member who gets up and speaks on it. I hope and I would expect that the Minister for Environment, who is responsible for this portfolio area, will of course get up and speak now on this motion. Of course he will.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

James NEWBURY: Oh, the minister says it is his lunchtime. Well, I am very, very sorry it is your lunchtime, Minister.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member has impugned me. I did not say it was my lunchbreak; I said the house stops for lunch. I cannot control that; he can.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): That is a matter of fact.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I would hope that the minister can delay his lunch on behalf of the 15,000 people that are affected by this bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I remind the member for Brighton that under standing orders we will be breaking for lunch at 1 o'clock, and this debate will continue after question time as per the standing orders. If you would like to continue your contribution, you have got 21 seconds left.

James NEWBURY: It is 19 now. The government has moved a guillotine because it is ashamed of its own bill. That is a fact. They are ashamed of their own bill, which is destroying the livelihoods of thousands of good Victorians.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (12:59): Like the rest of the people on this side of the house, I realise the Manager of Opposition Business loves to hear his own voice. What a sanctimonious rant when there was an agreement –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member has not yet spoken about the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I will rule on the point of order. Given that he has had only a few seconds, I will allow him some additional time but remind him that this is a procedural motion, which is a narrow debate.

Paul EDBROOKE: ‘Confusion hath made its masterpiece.’ Look at how confused these people are over there.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Members

Minister for Planning

Absence

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

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery today former Speaker and member for Werribee the Honourable Dr Ken Coghill.

Michael O’Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Malvern is warned.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Transport infrastructure

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. On Monday the Deputy Premier said Melbourne Airport rail is a \$17 billion major project:

Seven billion dollars in combination with the \$10 billion from the Commonwealth and the state that makes it – I think on my maths – a \$17 billion project. We’d be able to get it done tomorrow.

Is this the government’s position?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I am absolutely delighted to answer this question from the Shadow Minister for Transport Infrastructure and member for Caulfield, because the key word in the shadow minister’s question, quoting not quite accurately the Deputy Premier, was ‘if’. Let me tell the shadow minister and the house the ‘if’. There was never \$7 billion on the table from the airport. At no stage was there \$7 billion.

Peter Walsh interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: No, I was in those meetings, Leader of the National Party, and there was never \$7 billion. That is why I was as surprised as the Deputy Premier was on Monday to hear of this \$7 billion. The Deputy Premier was surprised. He expressed surprise on Monday, as did I, because it

is simply fact that there was never \$7 billion on the table from the airport. What is a fact is of course that the airport project is a project that has three partners that are required to deliver this project: the state government, the federal government and of course the airport themselves. What you need when you are building a train line to the front door of the airport is to get from the fence line to the front door of the airport, and to be able to do that you need the cooperation of the landowner – in this instance, the airport.

We have been clear for some time now that the negotiations with the airport have been frustrated. They have caused delay, and the only talk of money from the airport has been their demands for hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question about the \$17 billion project. Is that the government's current position?

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

Jacinta ALLAN: This mythical \$7 billion was of course something that was referred to in the context of a market-led proposal that the airport was part of some years ago. I will refer to something the Minister for Transport Infrastructure has said. The former Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the former Premier Daniel Andrews did not agree on much, but they agreed that that was a dud deal. They agreed that that was an absolute dud deal, which we both collectively did not support. What we need for this project to proceed is the airport's cooperation, which is why the Commonwealth have appointed a mediator, and we are working with the Commonwealth on that process.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:06): On Monday the Deputy Premier refused to rule out additional costs to taxpayers following revelations of structural defects on the West Gate Tunnel major project. How much more will Victorian taxpayers have to pay for the West Gate Tunnel?

The SPEAKER: Member for Caulfield, I will allow the question because in your substantive question you referred to a major project and in your supplementary question you referred to a major project.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): I am delighted to talk about major projects. If the shadow minister wants to talk about major projects, let us talk about major projects. We have already talked about the West Gate Tunnel. We can talk about the North East Link, which is going to support 8000 jobs. We can talk about the removal of 76 level crossings, with more to come – again, projects that those opposite have not supported along the way. Then of course the big major project is the Metro Tunnel. Your question was all about major projects, member for Caulfield. I am being entirely consistent –

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question. I know she is scared about how much the West Gate Tunnel is actually going to cost. If the Premier wants to talk –

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Caulfield –

David Southwick: Can I finish my point of order, please, Speaker?

The SPEAKER: No. The member for Caulfield will resume his seat. The point of order was on relevance; there is no need to extrapolate on that. There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course I am delighted to continue to talk about major projects. As the Minister for Health knows, there are major projects like the Footscray Hospital, which is also due to open next year, and then of course there is the Suburban Rail Loop. The Suburban Rail Loop, which the Leader of the Opposition –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Environment, you are warned.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this question, on relevance, related to the comments of the Premier's stalking horse.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Speaker, I am delighted to answer this question consistent with your ruling that I focus on talking about major projects, and that is exactly what we are doing. Only this side of the house can talk about major projects; they have only opposed them.

Ministers statements: National Reconciliation Week

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:09): It is National Reconciliation Week, and this year's theme is 'Now more than ever', and doesn't that theme matter. Across Victoria local communities, schools and footy clubs are hearing this call and taking action. They are learning more about Victoria's 60,000 years of First Peoples culture and taking meaningful steps towards reconciliation. They are adopting Aboriginal languages as names for their schools and council wards and running Indigenous footy rounds, and how good was the AFL's Indigenous round. Meanwhile, if it was not bad enough that those opposite are backflipping on treaty, the National Party state conference on the weekend called on all governments not to fund welcome to country ceremonies anymore. What a disgraceful mark of disrespect to Aboriginal people in this state. They are always playing politics with First Nations culture, and it is a disgrace. It is not reconciliation. Reconciliation is about every one of us strengthening our relationships for the good of all Victorians.

For all of us in this house, there are small steps that we can take towards reconciliation. We can listen to what the historic Yoorrook Justice Commission is saying about the truth and history of this state. We can support treaty. Contrary to what those opposite scaremonger about, treaty is not about taking people's backyards, it is about a new relationship and a way forward with this state's First Nations people and giving them power to make decisions over their own future, their kids' education and family housing. Treaty is reconciliation. It is about shared histories, about coming together, about a better future for all Victorians.

Onshore conventional gas

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:11): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Last week the minister for energy said there is no gas available to extract onshore. However, a 2020 report by the Geological Survey of Victoria, a government agency, found there is commercially feasible onshore conventional gas. Why has the minister denied advice from the government's own agency?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:12): I will make it absolutely clear. I have been absolutely clear, and all of my comments on the availability of gas have been informed by expert advice, not like those on the opposite side here, who just want to frack and want to introduce nuclear power into Victoria.

Members interjecting.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: No, that is right – exactly what you want to do. I have been very clear. The lead scientist made very clear in 2020–21 the availability of conventional onshore gas in Victoria. Can I also point to another expert, and that is the Australian Energy Market Operator. I refer everyone – and I am happy to table it, Speaker, but I will send them a copy if they like – to the latest AEMO report, the Victorian planning report of March this year. It tells us about what the anticipated Victorian production of gas is that is due in 2024 – anticipated zero; 2025, zero; 2026, six.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, if the minister is reading from a document, can I ask her to table it, please.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Speaker is on her feet. The minister has said she will table the document.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on the tabling of the document, it was visible. Can the minister table the document she actually said she would table, which contains written notes on it. There are handwritten notes on it.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order. The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: The minister will table the document she referred to.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: I indeed was the first to offer this document, and I am very happy to table my notes on this, because maybe the Leader of the Opposition will actually learn something about the gas sector in Victoria. In 2026 the market operator has indicated 6 gigajoules of new supply will potentially come forward; in 2027, 13 gigajoules; and in 2028, 14. Do you know what Victoria's total consumption is –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was not about the minister's refusal to approve any licences.

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

Lily D'AMBROSIO: Those opposite do not want to admit this, but the fact is no organisation has come forward since the moratorium that they imposed in 2012, extended again towards the end of 2012 and extended again in 2014 and which remained in place until all of the processes and investigations were concluded by our lead scientist. The facts are these: no-one has come forward seeking an exploration permit from this government. Not one has come forward. If they come forward, I will be very happy to consider any exploration application according to the legislation that is available.

But the reality is this: they want to deal with the ideology of this debate. That is not what we are interested in. Our interest is dealing with the geological fact. The market operator, the ACCC and those who know about this, including the lead scientist, have demonstrated that there are insufficient supplies of new gas reserves that are able to come into Victoria to meet our future needs. I am prepared to take the advice of experts rather than those opposite – the experts who know what their job is, rather than the Leader of the Opposition, who is actually trying to hang on to his own job.

The SPEAKER: Just for clarification, the minister will table the document after the supplementary question and the answer.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:17): The minister has advised the house that Victoria has the best insulated system in terms of gas prices. Her department has pointed out that Victoria faces daily, monthly and yearly gas shortages from 2026. Why is the minister again disregarding advice from her own officials?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:18): I thank the member for the supplementary question, but it seems to be somewhat confused. The market operator has been very clear about the things that need to happen for the east coast, not just Victoria but the east coast, including New South Wales, which happens to have relied on Victoria's gas exports for decades, as have South Australia and parts of Tasmania. This is the reality of what we are facing. The reality is this: we need to find new sources of gas to meet the declining availability of current resources into Victoria. That is geology.

You do not have to listen to me, Lily D'Ambrosio, but you listen to the experts, because if you do not listen to the experts and adjust and actually do something about it to meet those shortfalls, then the people who are going to pay are Victorians. But the reality is this: Victoria remains the cheapest place to actually source electricity and gas.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:19): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is bringing down power prices for Victorians. Last week the new Victorian default offer was released, with electricity bills for VDO customers going down by an average of \$100 from 1 July. That is real money back in the pockets of hardworking Victorians. 520,000 Victorian families are on the Victorian default offer. Victorians on the default offer will also be paying around \$311 less than the average default market offer in the rest of the country. It is great news for businesses as well, with the small business VDO going down by \$261. Their bills – and those opposite might actually want to learn something about this – will now be \$1290 cheaper on average than what small businesses are paying in other states.

The VDO is a very important safeguard for Victorians, with thousands on the VDO paying around \$200 less than the standing offers that the VDO replaced. That did not happen by accident; it happened because a Labor government was elected and decided to put fairness back into the energy system, because what we are about delivering is fairness for consumers, fairness in terms of price and a whole agenda to ensure that we continue to have and enjoy the cheapest prices in the country. We have the lowest power prices because of our record renewable energy investments and because of instruments, like the VDO, that take money from those that want to make obscene profits from people's power bills to make sure that there is fairness in the system.

Victorians can be assured that a Labor government will never slug them with nuclear energy, the most expensive form that we could have. What would the fallout of that be? Higher power prices and the opposition leader losing his job.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the next question, Minister, you need to provide a document to the Clerk.

Energy policy

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:21): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. The minister for energy said about gas, 'I'm happy to say that Madeleine King is wrong.' Is the federal Labor minister Madeleine King wrong because there is no gas to extract in Victoria?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:22): I thank the member for the question. What I will say is that our commitment and our call, from this government, has always been that the national government, whatever colour it is, ought to have a domestic gas reserve policy in place. We are producing more gas than we actually need in this country, but the fact is too much of it is getting exported overseas at cheaper prices. In fact in some contracts it is actually being exported at cheaper prices than we are paying for it here in Victoria. Our interests are absolutely clear and our commitment has been really, really clear. We need to ensure that the more than sufficient supply that we do have nationally in the market is actually made available at a fair price to households and businesses that need it. That is what I look forward to – one day seeing that come to fruition. Just the other day I think Minister Bowen admitted that, if things had been different over the years, they would have potentially looked at the need for a gas reservation policy.

We are absolutely on the side of consumers. We want to make sure we have got sufficient supplies of electricity – that is why we are building record amounts of renewable energy to make sure that we continue to deliver the cheapest power bills in the national electricity market – and that we have

sufficient supplies of gas to meet our needs. The reality is, geologically, Victoria's gas reserves are running low. If anyone can find some gas here, I will be the first one to welcome them into Victoria to seek an exploration licence. If they can find any, that is fantastic. But the fact is, even if they can find any, the small amounts that are being found are in no way sufficient to meet the decline in reserves that is happening right now. I will take my advice from the experts any day. My advice from the experts any day puts geology above ideology every single day.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:24): The minister has said on numerous occasions that Victorian Labor put geology ahead of ideology – and again. Why are the government putting their anti-gas ideology ahead of the evidence agreed to by the federal Labor government?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:24): I thank the member for the supplementary question. I ask the member to provide this evidence. What is this evidence that is contrary to the market operator's advice? What is this evidence that is contrary to the ACCC's advice? What is this evidence that somehow means we have an El Dorado of gas reserves in Victoria for which this awful Victorian government is stopping people from coming forward to ask for and be given an exploration licence for? They can make it up because it suits them. But let us remind people about what it means to have confidence in the market and actually have an agenda rather than running scared. Who was it that put the moratorium in place in the first place in 2012 on fracking and coal seam gas? Who extended that to conventional gas towards the end of 2012? Who did that again in 2014? Those opposite – (*Time expired*)

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) (14:25): I rise to update the house on the government's commitment to delivering the Suburban Rail Loop. We know that this project will radically change how we move around the city, how we work, how we study and how we add more homes. But the SRL is much, much more than a train line. It is one of the most transformational transport and housing projects anywhere in the country. Just as the Prime Minister said:

I can't think of a more exciting infrastructure project in the entire nation ...

That is why federal Labor backed this project with \$2.2 billion. Let us be clear on this: the SRL is going to connect Victorians to jobs, retail, education, health services and each other. It will stimulate thousands of new homes around SRL precincts – 70,000 new homes for SRL East alone. And SRL East from Box Hill to Cheltenham is well underway. There are 1200 workers on the ground right now. By 2026 we will have 4000 Victorian workers hard at work, and trains will be running by 2035.

If you are against the SRL, you are against jobs, you are against transport connections, you are against housing and you are against public transport, and that is what is under threat from the Leader of the Opposition. One week he wants to scrap the SRL; the next week he wants to put it on pause. I just cannot keep up. Is he sacking 4000 workers, or are they going to be put in limbo? Let us be clear, when they talk about cancelling the SRL, this is what they are saying: they will sack 4000 workers, they will cancel 24,000 jobs, they will make it harder for thousands of Victorian workers to get an affordable home and they will ignore what Victorians have voted for twice. We have got a clear and decisive vision for Victoria's future, while those opposite do not even know who will be taking them to the very next election.

Youth crime prevention

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:28): My question is for the Premier. The YSAS youth crime prevention program has supported over 10,000 young people with critical early intervention – young people in Victoria who have had recent contact with police. But the Victorian Labor government has just cut its funding by \$1.85 million per year. This funding cut will mean that 330 young people every year will be denied access to an effective program that can turn them away

from crime and towards a better future. Premier, youth crime prevention programs work, so will the government urgently reconsider its decision to cut funding to YSAS?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:28): I thank the member for Richmond for her question. In terms of the allegation made about YSAS, who I do want to acknowledge are an excellent agency who do very good and important work, there has been no change or adjustment to their core level of funding. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify for the member, because perhaps she is not aware of this, that this organisation and many others during the period of the pandemic were provided with some additional one-off funding allocations to provide them with support that was in recognition that during the pandemic many organisations – we all had our lives disrupted during the period of the pandemic – needed to be provided with some additional support to be able to work through that period of time and continue their service provision. It is this one-off funding that has now come to a conclusion, but I do want to re-emphasise for the member for Richmond there has been no change to YSAS’s core funding.

In terms of the broader observations that the member for Richmond made around investments in crime prevention, we absolutely have a strong focus on crime prevention, whether it is through the work that is done every single day with Victoria Police and their targeted and dedicated youth police officers, who work with young people across our community, or the work that is done in the youth justice portfolio that is providing dedicated support to young people who are at risk or who may already be engaged in at-risk behaviour. One of the other key areas in supporting and preventing youth crime is to make sure young kids get a good education, and that is why initiatives like free kinder, free TAFE and of course the school saving bonus are about making sure that young people can remain engaged and connected with school opportunities, whether they be in the formal schooling system, but also we know in the TAFE sector they can provide some really important pathways for young people to go and have a rewarding career. That will also continue to be the focus of our work in this youth crime prevention area.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:31): I thank the Premier for her response, but the pandemic cannot be used here as an excuse. This funding was a result of years of advocacy and increased need, and that need has only increased even more post pandemic. It also comes as Labor is increasing police funding by 8 per cent as it drags its feet on raising the age of criminal responsibility to keep kids out of jail, where they do not belong, and funnelling over \$30 million into a new ankle bracelet monitoring program for kids. It is almost like the Victorian government is letting the police lobby write its policies instead of listening to First Nations communities and human rights experts. Why is Labor increasing funding for policing and incarcerating children instead of keeping them out of prisons in the first place?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): I thank the member for Richmond for her supplementary question. It was a little difficult to hear precisely her question because, as we have seen, the member for Richmond prefers to provide content for her social media outlets rather than making a contribution to the Parliament of Victoria. I will again reiterate for the benefit of the member for Richmond that we are absolutely focused on supporting young people. We should not be demonising them; we should not be attacking them. We should be recognising that young people have a range of different challenges that require a range of different supports, whether it is absolutely at the earliest opportunity to keep young people engaged in schools or, for those who are at risk, supporting dedicated crime prevention programs like the more than 940 crime prevention initiatives we have supported since 2015. We will continue to have a range of measures to support young people wherever they are.

Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ family violence services

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (14:33): Yesterday was LGBTIQ+ Domestic Violence Awareness Day. The Allan Labor government knows all victim-survivors of family and sexual violence should be seen and should be believed. Sixty-five per cent of queer people have experienced family violence. This includes intimate partners as well

as family members who show their intolerance through using violence, and using violence is a choice no-one should make. Our rainbow community can face additional barriers to support, including being less likely to seek help because of fears of stigma and bigotry. It is important we keep taking dedicated preventative action to address this violence before it starts and to address inequality and intolerance.

Since the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence we have continued to lead the nation in investing in building the capacity of our wonderful family violence sector. The Allan Labor government is preventing and responding to family and sexual violence, including with a focus on rainbow communities. This includes heightening awareness in queer communities of the complexities of family violence. The LGBTQIA+ family violence prevention project supports resource development, building the evidence base for primary prevention of family violence in queer communities. Through grassroots grants we are helping young people understand affirmative consent. Our innovative and nation-leading family violence reforms recognise the need for tailored support services that address the diversity of our communities. That includes funding for Switchboard's Rainbow Door helpline, Thorne Harbour Health's GBTQ men's behaviour change program, Queerspace's Futures Free from Violence program and the WithRespect specialist family violence service. We are rolling out the Rainbow Tick to mainstream specialist family violence services, ensuring safe and inclusive places for all victim-survivors. On this side of the chamber equality is not negotiable, and this government will continue our work to make sure that every Victorian lives free from violence.

Payroll tax

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:35): My question is to the Treasurer. The Labor member for Mordialloc privately lobbied the Treasurer to exempt Cornish College in his electorate from Labor's school tax. In the letter, the Labor member for Mordialloc stated that the tax would be detrimental to the school community and that it would have substantial impact on the mental health and wellbeing programs on offer to school students. Is it government policy that schools should be forced to cut mental health programs to pay for Labor's financial mismanagement?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:36): I thank the member for her question. I make it very clear that so far as the member for Mordialloc is concerned you could not find a more sterling or substantial representative of his electorate and, might I say, a very good member of a Labor government committed to making sure that education is provided in a very substantial way by a government that has been investing in schools. The government of course has been making a very substantial effort in ensuring that there is fairness in the way that our payroll tax system operates. We cannot have a system that provides that state-run education has to in effect pay the equivalent of the payroll tax number, but those opposite of course feel that private schools with fee-paying incomes over \$15,000 should be exempt effectively from payroll tax.

I understand that the member for Mordialloc – a sterling advocate for those who come to him and seek a voice in this Parliament – recognised that he had an obligation to put a concern, whether or not it was one that he believed was consistent with the government's position or indeed one that he might privately ascribe to. But what I can tell you is that all members of Parliament are welcome to advocate on behalf of schools in their electorate and in fact any other constituent who becomes aggrieved. Those opposite might well say to them, 'Don't come near us; don't tell us about your problems, because it's not our policy.' We at least give a hearing to those who feel to some extent aggrieved by the choices we make. That in no way derogates from this government's commitment to and continuation of ensuring that we have fairness in the way that payroll tax is applied.

Jess Wilson: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question is specifically about cuts to mental health programs due to Labor's financial mismanagement.

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The SPEAKER: The Treasurer was being relevant to the question that was asked. The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:38): Can the Treasurer confirm how many Labor members have written to him about the impact of Labor's school tax?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:39): I thank the member for her question, but I can assure her that I speak to many members of this Parliament – some on the opposite side, some on this side. Many of them sometimes wish for information. Sometimes they seek clarity. Sometimes they actually want to advocate about concerns expressed to them by their community. 'How many' is the question. Well, more than I can count have advocated to me about the concerns of their constituents, and that is appropriate. So far as this government is concerned, we will always listen to the constituents, to Victorians, but one thing we will never do is put in place an unfair and unjust system that basically requires government-funded schools to pay the equivalent of payroll tax whilst those opposite will advocate for preferred and special treatment for elite high-fee schools charging more than \$15,000 in annual fees.

Ministers statements: multicultural communities

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): I am pleased to rise to update the house on how here in Victoria we will always welcome migrants to this great state, as we have done for decade upon decade, when you look back to the discovery of gold in the state in 1851 and how people started coming here from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Germany and China. Then we of course know that by the 1970s Victoria became the home of migrants from all over the world. Our Vietnamese, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Lebanese, Indian, South American, South-East Asian and African communities, just to name a few, are a fundamental part of our social fabric. We know too that some have escaped conflict and some of them have sought a better life, and we are so proud that they have chosen that better life here in Victoria. Then of course along the way we have also encouraged and supported skilled migrants to choose Melbourne and Victoria, and that comes with a range of skilled professions: doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, scientists, pilots and early childhood educators. We have done this through our skilled and business migration program. Then you add to this the way we welcome more and more international students, and that brings together a fast-growing economy and a vibrant community here in Victoria.

Here in Victoria we want a vibrant, skilled and successful community. Also we want them to continue to support the work we are doing in building up transport, building up homes and building up big renewable energy projects – things that our families and our economy need to continue to grow strongly – not turning back the clock and making ourselves smaller and weaker. I will say this to Victoria's proud multicultural communities: we will never be architects of fear towards Victoria's multicultural communities. We will stand with them against those who would rather demonise migration and cower behind the federal Leader of the Opposition in the Liberal Party than deliver a plan to build homes and better transport links.

Constituency questions

South-West Coast electorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:43): (660) My question is for the Minister for Health, and my question is: can the minister categorically rule out the Labor government merging any of the south-west health services within the next two years? Those services are South West Healthcare, Portland District Health, Heywood Rural Health, Moyne Health Services and Terang and Mortlake Health Service. These services deserve their own local boards making local decisions. The way Portland District Health has been treated indicates amalgamation; it has been subjected to death by a thousand cuts. Maternity services have struggled, contracts of specialists at PDH have not been renewed and there is still no appointment of a CEO at PDH – all indications the minister is looking to be able to justify mergers. Mergers at any of these health services will mean people having to travel to

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Geelong and Melbourne for procedures that could be done in Warrnambool and Portland, resulting in poorer patient outcomes and further disadvantage for regional communities. Minister, the community rightly expects a yes or no answer. Your previous answers of 'No hospitals will be closed' does not answer the question regarding mergers.

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:44): (661) The container deposit scheme has now given 10-cent refunds for over 500 million containers – that is absolutely huge. We have got a number of over-the-counter collection points, reverse vending machines and a depot in Knox that have accepted heaps and heaps. It has been great to see the take-up from locals, but I know people would like to see more spots locally where they can collect their refunds. So my constituency question is to the Minister for Environment: how many more reverse vending machines are being planned for the Knox local government area?

Shepparton electorate

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:44): (662) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the information I seek is: when will the minister undertake an extensive bus service review for Shepparton? It has been 15 years since a review was last carried out, and it is well overdue. The current services do not meet the growth of the region and increased demand. Dysons bus group are in the process of building a new state-of-the-art bus depot, to be completed by October. The new depot will serve as a hub where more than 300 regional buses will be serviced and repaired. Currently all damaged buses need to be taken to Melbourne. I have met with Greg Fitzsimmons and Roy Dyson, who are inundated with requests for expanded Shepparton bus services, and they are very frustrated that they are investing in the region and progressing their business, yet a review for Shepparton to increase services has not yet happened. The region has grown significantly, with increased population and housing estates including Kialla, Congupna and Shepparton East, yet they are not connected to bus routes. Public consultation began in February for the Shepparton south-east precinct structure plan, which will see up to 2500 homes to accommodate a population of more than 6000. The need for bus services to this precinct is well overdue.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:45): (663) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. What is the government doing to improve road safety and traffic congestion in Kororoit, particularly along the Western Freeway? The Western Freeway is a critical road link in Melbourne's west, connecting communities and local industries. The Western Freeway sees approximately 86,000 vehicles per day travel between Caroline Springs and Melton, and with 72 families moving into the Melton LGA each week, that figure is expected to rise to approximately 113,000 vehicles by 2031. These projections show the impending challenges my community of Kororoit face as they navigate traffic through this area.

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:46): (664) My question is to the Premier, and I ask: how can my constituent Caitlin Houston access the support she deserves? At 5:20 on 18 September 2023 Caitlin disembarked at tram stop 41 along route 67 onto an unparallel pavement which exceeded the allowable variance. She fell because of the condition of the tram stop. This fall led to Ms Houston incurring medical expenses and costs of roughly \$5000, not including ancillary pain and suffering. A secondary injury then occurred, and she made a claim to Yarra Trams, who have stalled, delayed and obfuscated their responsibility, eventually finding that:

... Yarra Trams advises that there is insufficient information to substantiate any liability of Yarra Trams and deny your claim.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

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Legislative Assembly

Wednesday 29 May 2024

Their determination includes a statement that it was raining at the time, despite the Bureau of Meteorology stating that it did not rain at all that day. Caitlin is not asking for much. This is about Yarra Trams admitting to the injury, and after eight months they still have not. They have given the family the run-around. Caitlin and the Houston family deserve better.

Eureka electorate

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (14:47): (665) My question is for the Minister for Planning. I am proud that my electorate is playing a large role in Victoria's energy transition. The many wind farms across my electorate are powering our state and will enable us to have a safe, affordable energy system into the future. A new wind farm is being proposed in Golden Plains, the Tall Tree Wind Farm. While many in my community support renewable energy, there is local concern about having their voices heard during the planning process. The member for Brighton and Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change is doing what the opposition always does, stirring fear in the community. I find it pretty funny that he would have a petition on his website which decries Melbourne ministers making decisions for locals. Last time I looked the shadow minister in Brighton was a long way from Golden Plains. So rather than create fear, I am seeking facts for them right here, right now. My question for the minister is: what pathways for community consultation and input will be available?

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:48): (666) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Last week I met with residents of Cremorne who are concerned their once vibrant neighbourhood is being rapidly overdeveloped by office buildings, with no oversight and no vision for the future. These families feel stranded on what they call 'the island of Cremorne' as massive office blocks rise up out of the ground with no footpaths, no setbacks, no bike racks, no open space. It should not be left to commercial developers to decide what our neighbourhoods look like. The community has called for building controls, for open space, for residential development and for safer streets for cyclists and pedestrians, and the council has done the work and submitted to the state government two design and development overlays and an urban design framework awaiting the minister's approval to exhibit. That was seven months ago. Minister, when will you approve the plans and make sure that Cremorne remains sustainable and livable as it grows?

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:49): (667) My constituency question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. What is the Victorian government doing to combat racism and promote social cohesion in the context of the tragic conflict in the Middle East? The ongoing conflict in Gaza continues to very much break the hearts of many across my community, with the military actions by the Netanyahu government having led to the devastating loss of innocent Palestinian lives, with 36,000-plus Palestinians, predominantly women and children, sadly killed. I continue to unequivocally condemn all acts of violence against innocent civilians and have previously called on the federal government to support urgent measures that can help bring an end to this conflict through the release of all Israeli civilian hostages by Hamas, an immediate humanitarian pause for essential aid to reach Palestinian civilians, an enduring ceasefire that protects innocent lives and adheres to international law and support for international efforts to facilitate a lasting and enduring peace in the Middle East through a renewed two-state solution process. These heartbreaking events continue to impact many in community, like Alia, aged 13, from the Australian International Academy in Coburg, and many of the children who have written to the children in Gaza and the Middle East who continue to be impacted by this conflict. I stand against antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Benambra electorate

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (14:50): (668) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. What additional funding has been requested by the New South Wales government to meet the reassessed costs of the makeover at the Albury campus of Albury Wodonga Health? I suspect that this

government has been duddled with the project, misled by bureaucrats hoping the initial funding would loosen the purse strings to meet the real cost. They knew it could not be done for the money or on that site. They say the costings have blown out by \$100 million. The failure of this plan is well documented. The site is too small, the ground is unstable, power and sewerage infrastructure are inadequate, and the road network and parking are shot. Before the 2022 election the then Premier stood on that site and declared that Victoria's \$225 million would deliver a single-site hospital for Albury–Wodonga's catchment of 250,000 people. It simply will not work. I plead with the government: let us work together on a solution. We can do better, and we must do better.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:51): (669) My constituency question is for the Attorney-General in the other place and concerns the South-East Monash Legal Service. Attorney-General, how is the Allan Labor government supporting the South-East Monash Legal Service to deliver legal education and access to justice in my electorate of Narre Warren South? Community legal centres do an incredible job. They make sure Victorians can access the legal support they need, whether it is to do with general legal advice and referrals or helping the most vulnerable when they go to court or when they are victims of family violence. South-East Monash Legal Services programs have been of tremendous benefit to our students and community, and I would like to thank Kristen Wallwork and Ashleigh Newnham and their team at South-East Monash Legal Service for all of their hard work. I look forward to sharing the Attorney-General's response with my community.

Bills

Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:52): I rise absolutely to speak on this adjournment motion, which is an affront to so many regional Victorians, whether you are in Gippsland at the pointy end of this callous decision or you are in my part of the world in western Victoria, where so many families and elderly people are going to be left suffering because of the lack of availability of firewood. To think that this government, which says it looks after the poor, it looks after the workers, it looks after communities – it simply does not. They have brought this bill to us today and they are cutting it off. They are not letting everybody who wants to talk on this bill put their case forward, stand up for their communities and raise with this government the absolute ridiculousness of this bill.

The fact that we are going to imagine that we can continue to live the way we do, with the use of firewood in people's woodboxes, in their slow-combustion heaters and their open fires, which so many regional Victorians do – where is that coming from? We look around this beautiful chamber, surrounded by timber. If we built this chamber today, this would be imported from an Indonesian rainforest. This government places so little value on the capacity of a modern First World economy and society, which Victoria is, to say, 'We can't manage forests. We can't manage forests in a sustainable, modern way to provide the resources that we need.' Instead, we are saying Finland can do it, Norway can do it, Canada can do it, the US can do it – all sorts of other equal countries can do it.

Pauline Richards: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would just like to invite the member to come back to the question, which is whether we adjourn the debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is on relevance, I take it, and the member had strayed into debating the bill, not the adjournment question.

Richard RIORDAN: It is easy to stray into debating the bill, because we are being denied the right to speak on the bill. Thirty per cent of my electorate is in fact forest, and it is forest that has been wonderfully managed for decades, if not a hundred years. It has been well managed, and it provides a

livelihood. These are important issues that we have a responsibility in this place to fully put on the record, to fully discuss, and this government is seeking to gag it. Why are they gagging it? The transparency on the gag is so there. This government does not want to be exposed for what it is doing to hardworking, innocent country people. It was bad enough that they promised that by 2030 they were going to kill off this industry. They sort of half-promised that we would get plantations in place. They sort of half-promised there would be transitions, but instead they rushed this legislation in. They have just literally told, I think it is, member for Gippsland South, 15,000 families around regional Victoria, who are now just waking up to it this year, that after 30 June that is it – all gone. They have got heavy equipment; many of these operators have millions of dollars of loans and equipment that they now do not have a use for. This government has not thought of that.

They have not thought through these things, and that is why we do not want to suspend the debate on this bill. These issues need to be tabled, and this government needs to put them on the record. We saw when the debate was continuing that the government were so ashamed of the presentation of this bill that they were all only doing little 2-minute vignettes. They have no respect for country communities, no respect for an industry that helped build this country – no respect for any of that. They have no respect for the people who, guess what, cannot go and afford the environment and energy minister's \$6000 electric heaters to put on the wall. That is because the minister does not realise so many people in country Victoria do not have power connections and they actually rely on firewood to keep warm. They just cannot get that.

Pauline Richards: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, once again I ask that you bring the member back to the debate that we are having on whether we adjourn.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member to continue on the adjournment motion.

Richard RIORDAN: It is important that we do not support this adjournment motion. Every member of this house has a right to be heard on this appalling legislation. We have a right to list the concerns of our constituents. We have a right to raise the fact that this state will now be relying on the importing of timber and timber products.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:57): I do rise to speak on this adjournment motion, and I support the motion. It is deeply disappointing, I think, to be in this position. There was a very robust, respectful and really important debate that took place prior to the luncheon interval regarding the bill itself. In that debate there were a number of very substantive and important contributions by members of the parties opposite, including the members for Gippsland South, Gippsland East, Narracan and Morwell, who made very considered, important contributions on the part of their communities. I think it is deeply disconcerting that this motion represents such cant and hypocrisy. To hear that members on this side somehow engage in vignettes, as the member for Polwarth suggested, I think really disparages the conventions of this place whereby there was an agreement that the house would move to considering the budget after lunch. It is a really important piece of debate, as we know, the take-note motion on the budget. I know the Manager of Opposition Business has been very keen that members should have the opportunity to debate the budget and to contribute to the take-note motion. So it is disappointing to hear the stunt and the verbal attacks that those at the table are seeking to engage in, which I think diminish the substantive quality of the debate that took place on the proceeding bill itself.

I am conscious this is a very narrow procedural motion, so I am not going to retread my own contribution to the debate, but I do want to reflect that it was an important debate. It was one that talked about the timber communities in Victoria and the importance of supporting those communities and of respecting the contribution that they have made and that VicForests has made to the stewardship of our forests.

In that debate I think there was some consternation at the way in which Greens members sought to disparage those communities and sought to diminish the importance of the support for those

communities. The reason I think that is germane to this narrow procedural debate is that the actions of those at the opposition bench similarly disparage the debate that was occurring –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a procedural debate, not an opportunity to verbal other members of the Parliament.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Melbourne. Yes, the member had strayed. I think he got the cue to come back. Please do so.

Iwan WALTERS: I did indeed, Deputy Speaker. It is indeed a narrow procedural debate, and the point I was merely seeking to make is that the debate itself that has been brought on by the actions of the Manager of Opposition Business I think diminishes the substantiveness and importance of the debate we had earlier.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do not think the member understands that this debate is about a motion moved by the government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member was on the adjournment motion and is to continue.

Iwan WALTERS: Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker. The member well understands, but it appears the fish are biting today. What I was merely suggesting was that I support the motion to adjourn debate in order that we can proceed to the take-note motion upon the budget. In the debate that was held earlier the contributions from those opposite, particularly the National Party members in Gippsland and other parts of Victoria, were very respectful, important contributions to the debate. I propose, as the members of the government do, that we now proceed to move on to considering the budget – the take-note motion that I know those opposite are very keen to debate. I am looking forward to hearing their contributions to see, as I said previously, whether they can grapple with that tension between wanting to spend more on everything and having no taxation to pay for it. I will leave my contribution there. I support the motion.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:01): I would like to speak on this procedural motion. We will not be supporting the adjournment. There are many members who still wish to contribute to this debate, including three members of the Greens. It is a very big, important matter that we are discussing here, and I think we should have adequate time. In particular I would just like to put on the record that we requested consideration in detail for this bill, and we were told that there would not be time for that, yet we are being asked to adjourn this debate so that we can move on to government members making their budget take-note motion speeches. Those could be done at any point. They could be done in future meetings of the Parliament, whereas we need consideration in detail on this bill. A consideration-in-detail stage of a bill should be general practice in this place, yet I think we have had it maybe two times, or not even, since we started this term of Parliament. Last term of Parliament I think we had it two times in the four years that we were in here.

It is a pretty bad practice in terms of transparency and integrity of the Parliament to never actually go to the third-reading stage of a bill. That is the stage where members have a chance to get up and ask the minister directly questions about a bill. It is very important for members who were elected by their communities to come here to scrutinise legislation. That is our job. That is what the community expects us to do, and yet the government are using their numbers in the Parliament to ram through changes that mean that we cannot do that job. I just do not think that is good for democracy. We should be able to get up here and ask questions of ministers about how those bills are going to impact the communities. There has been a lot of talk in this debate about community members impacted by this bill. But we have a lot of questions about exactly how they will be impacted and exactly how the government is going to ameliorate those impacts, and we cannot ask them. We cannot ask them of the minister because the minister will not front up for a third-reading stage. We have the time to do it if we continue to debate this bill and not adjourn it.

Often when we ask for consideration in detail, as we did in this instance, the government says we can do that in the upper house, but the minister is not in the upper house. The minister is not in the other place; the minister is here. Both ministers who are responsible – the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Agriculture, who is responsible for forestry – are actually in this house. They should be required to answer the questions, not just send their staff members in to whisper answers in the ears of unrelated ministers in the upper house because the ministers here do not want to front up because they are not up to it, as has been said in the chamber today. They are not up for it. They do not have the background. They have not done the details.

I think that Victorians expect a government with ministers who are able to front up and defend their own legislation, and if they are not able to do that, well, what is going on? So we reiterate our call for consideration in detail on this bill. We ask the government to reconsider their adjournment of this matter so that we can continue debate – go into third reading. We can ask all of those important questions that I outlined in my speech. I have got a lot of questions I want to ask.

I want to know where the billion dollars went that this government has given to the logging industry to move to plantations when they have not actually moved to plantations. They have moved to logging in national parks and logging in old-growth forests in Tasmania. Where is that billion dollars? I expect the Victorian government to know the answer to that, and that is what I could ask if we did not adjourn the debate and we kept debating it. I want to know why Forest Fire Management Victoria is not subject to the same environmental surveying and environmental regulations and laws that VicForests was, poor though they were. Why is their own department able to go in and log hollow-bearing old-growth trees that are known to house critically endangered species without any rules or requirements?

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, it is a procedural matter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member had strayed a little from the motion.

Ellen SANDELL: I was merely making the point that, on the procedural matter, the reason that we are not supporting the adjournment is because we have requested to go into consideration in detail to ask these very important questions that the Victorian taxpayers deserve to get the answers to and the Victorian community deserve to get the answers to. These are questions that the government is refusing to answer.

If the minister will not front up to Parliament and give those answers, what have they got to hide? Why are they hiding the answers to these very important questions from the Victorian community? I think that Victorians should expect that their ministers would front up, defend their legislation and answer these important questions from members of the opposition, the crossbench, independents and Greens who have been elected to come in here and scrutinise legislation. We are not being given the chance to scrutinise legislation. We are not given that chance in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, where we have 5 to 10 minutes to ask questions of ministers either. I think it is absolutely outrageous, and that is why we will not be supporting the adjournment.

Assembly divided on Belinda Wilson's motion:

Ayes (48): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, 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, 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, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

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

Motion agreed to.

Debate adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Budget papers 2024–25

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (15:13): I move:

That this house takes note of the 2024–25 budget papers.

It gives me great pleasure to talk on this incredible budget the Treasurer handed down. Part of the funding in this budget is for the Great Outdoors Taskforce. What that debate on the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024 reminded me just before is that there are extremes in this Parliament. They exist in the Greens political party, and they exist in the Liberal–Nationals. Both parties are not fit to govern Victoria, so you need the centrist party, the Labor Party, to come in and calm down both sides, both extremes. There are the disjointed and a bit over-the-top remarks by the Manager of Opposition Business, scaring everybody about impending doom and gloom, and the extremes on the other side, in the Greens political party, scaring everybody on the other side. It just goes to show that those two parties are not fit to govern Victoria.

You need a centrist party like us to come in and say that public land should be for all Victorians. It should be absolutely for those communities that live in regional and rural Victoria. It should be for their benefit economically and their benefit in terms of their way of life, and that is what we are here to support. But we are always here to support the intergenerational benefit of Victorian public lands. You cannot have intergenerational benefit from Victorian public lands if you do not look after those public lands. We are looking after those public lands, but we will also allow activities that Victorians enjoy: bushwalking; nature observation and picnicking; camping; car touring, including four-wheel driving; trail bike riding on roads and tracks; mountain biking and cycling; horseriding on tracks and roads; and a whole range of other activities. You cannot expect it from the Liberal–National Party, whose view is effectively 'Everything should be available everywhere on any given day anywhere. Forget nature, don't worry about nature. Don't worry about preserving anything for the future.' And the Greens' view is 'Lock 'em up and throw away the key.' This party is a party for all Victorians, a centrist party that says public land is for the public. What does that actually mean? It means that you look after it for future generations but you allow people to go out there and enjoy it. That is what our government is about. That is what this Premier is about, hence the establishment of the Great Outdoors Taskforce funded in this budget and headed up by the former environment minister. I could not think of a better person than the former environment minister to head up this Great Outdoors Taskforce. There is \$11 million –

James Newbury interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: The Manager of Opposition Business says, 'Is she being paid?' No, let us get people to work for free, Manager of Opposition Business. What a ridiculous interjection. He has not done a day's work without being paid, this fellow, but apparently others cannot be paid. Of course she is being paid, as she should be, and nowhere near enough.

We have got the Great Outdoors Taskforce. We have got the former environment minister of Victoria – I could not be prouder to work with someone of that calibre – and then we have got two other people with huge environmental credentials. We have got a tourism-focused person on there from Gippsland

Tourism and we have got an outdoor recreation focused person, and of course we have got traditional owners on the governing board as well. That is the recipe for a successful outcome on the Great Outdoors Taskforce. They have got an \$11 million budget. They will come back to us early next year and they will tell us what the community have told them about what they want to see in these 1.8 million hectares of land that we have now unencumbered effectively for future generations of Victorians, including the Victorians who live in those areas, about what is possible in that area – as I said, tourism, outdoor recreation and a whole range of other activities – and what areas have to be looked after through conservation measures. That is what the Great Outdoors Taskforce will do, and I cannot wait for their report. They are funded, they have got the authorising environment, and they are going to do good work. Remember that what we have effectively got in this parcel of land and the existing state forest is a parcel of land bigger than the size of Tasmania. We have an opportunity here to do something of a significant nature for future communities of Victorians.

That is not all that the budget does in terms of regional communities and my portfolio more generally. I had the real pleasure a couple of weeks ago to launch effectively in excess of \$100 million of funding to regional Victoria just in my portfolio – over \$100 million. They cannot say the same thing. When they were in government they closed many, many services regional Victorians relied on, from rail to hospitals – we heard it all. They come here saying, ‘Do more, do more.’ Well, you should have done a little bit more when you were in power. In the last few weeks I have announced \$38 million for the extension of the Regional Events Fund – \$38 million only for regional events, not metro events. There is \$62 million for regional tourism investment – \$62 million. I announced that funding at Phillip Island Nature Parks, where they are doing work right now on a \$5 million upgrade of the boardwalk. Not only are the penguins protected, they also have –

Michael O’Brien interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: I will take up the interjection. The member for Malvern says, ‘How is the Boxing Day test going?’ Can I just say to the member for Malvern: we have not needed your help to curate the best major events calendar for a decade, and I will not be asking for your help now. Don’t you worry about how that is going. Don’t you worry. All you need to worry about is getting tickets for when it happens. That is all you need to worry about.

Members interjecting.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the minister is on his feet at the moment. He is a member of the executive. He knows that responding to interjections is disorderly. There is a very important budget which is being considered at the moment, and surely the minister has some positive things to talk about without being so disorderly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): In terms of being disorderly, I would say the interjections across the table have been disorderly as well. Can I please bring the minister back to the take-note motion, and can we please have some quiet so we can actually hear the minister.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: It is the best fun they have had all week. They cannot help themselves. The budget delivers a big uplift in the major events calendar, because we know under our government major events are responsible for \$3.3 billion in economic activity. That is from major events.

Just for the record, the member referenced that apparently it was Jeff Kennett who brought the grand prix. Do you know who it was that set up the Victorian Major Events Company, the decades-ago version of Visit Victoria? It was Joan Kirner.

A member: Ron Walker.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: No, no. Who actually commissioned Ron Walker to form the major events company? It was Joan Kirner. It is always interesting when you hold the other side to account; they come back with a distorted view of history.

Nonetheless the other thing that I am really proud of in the portfolios that the Premier gifted to me, effectively, is the outdoor recreation portfolio. We have done an incredible amount of work in the fishing industry with recreational fishing and commercial fisheries. We have achieved a situation where we can have in this state both commercial fishing operations and recreational fishing operations. When it comes to recreational fishing the investment has been enormous, because of effectively what is a hypothecated fund through the fishing licence fees that go back into a central trust and are then used to effectively fund infrastructure and fish-stocking operations. We stock more fish in Victorian waterways; more fish is really important. The member for Clarinda and I were both at Karkarook Park. We stock more fish in Victorian waterways, both inland waterways and coastal waterways, than all states and territories combined. We hit a milestone of 10 million fish stocked about six weeks ago, two months ago. I celebrated that milestone at Lake Wendouree in Ballarat, where I met with the Ballarat Fly Fishers Club, a great club which has been around for I think the best part of 50 or 60 years. They are extraordinarily complimentary of the work of the Victorian Farmers Federation and the work of our apparatus, our investment of 10 million fish stocked in one year, and our support of fishing clubs through a range of things they do. I stocked Lake Wendouree with some trout, and I was really proud to do that. Recreational fishing is a fundamental –

A member interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Yes, I did. I didn't actually get them on. I did it from the safety of the deck, where after a good fishing –

A member interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: No, I did not go for a coffee. I was on the deck where, at the beautiful fishing club, the members watch the beautiful sun on the water while they are fishing and may have a bevvy or two. They may have had a beer or two. I did not. I stocked Lake Wendouree. But fishing is fundamentally important for families, and it is important for mental health and for regional economies. Waterways right through regional Victoria benefit from the visitations they get because of our fishing support and investments. We are really proud. Unlike the Greens political party, who diagnose a whole range of ills around this amazing initiative, I thought, every grade 5 student in Victoria got a fishing kit –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: It is incredible. In a day and age when we try and get young people involved in healthier activities, somehow the Greens political party finds a problem with that. Anyway, that investment I am really proud of, as I am of Snobs Creek hatchery, near Eildon. I was joined by the member for Eildon – it was really good; we opened the next instalment, effectively, the next footprint of that –

James Newbury interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Acting Speaker, I am going to resist the temptation. The member for Eildon and I opened what is effectively a threatened species hatchery. It is incredible. This is, again, funded by the investments we put back in from the fishing licence fees. It is effectively a science lab which looks after threatened species not only existing right now in Victoria but in terms of preventing the death of certain communities of threatened species when there are bushfires and storms. This has the capacity to take a community of a threatened species, put them into this special facility at Snobs Creek and actually look after them while there are natural disasters going on in Victoria. I think they were talking about 10 threatened species. It is a partnership with the federal government, so we have federal government representation there. It was a fantastic example of investments in the full circle of fishing, not just fishing and fishing clubs, not just infrastructure, but looking after the actual fish themselves, including threatened species. You can do it all if you do not have the extremes which we see on the other side of politics, right? You can do it all. In fact 220 waterways are benefiting from the 10 million fish we have stocked in one 12-month period. It is an accessible, affordable activity.

This government and the Premier are all for Victorians getting out in the great outdoors and enjoying the great outdoors, but with that comes an obligation. There comes an obligation to look after the natural environment so that it is there for your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren and future generations of Victorians. There is a middle road here. That is why we have been going around regional Victoria asking people what they think, and they have been coming to us in droves.

James Newbury interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: They are saying no to what, member for Brighton? Acting Speaker, exhibit A: the member for Brighton. I have just said all this about what we are actually doing, and he comes back with his Trumpesque headline: 'You're locking it up.' Clearly we are not locking it up, and he has got no evidence of that. This is part of the problem with current politics on that side. It becomes binary, it becomes untruthful and it becomes really unhelpful.

We are asking Victorians what they want to see with that extraordinary gift of 1.8 million hectares of land, and they want to see tourism opportunities, they want to see outdoor recreation opportunities and they want to see conservation opportunities. When the taskforce comes back early next year, we will be able to do all of those things in good measure. We will be able to be proper and true custodians, together with traditional owners, of the lands that we have inherited and give Victorians the best of all worlds going into the future.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (15:28): I was going to start on the budget, but given I did not get the chance to speak on the forestry bill and given this budget does provide for a pitiful amount of support for soon-to-be-sacked forestry workers, I thought I would just put this point on the record. I think all members received last month a book, unsolicited, in our electorate offices from David Lindenmayer called *The Forest Wars*. I did notice there was a reference in that book to one of my friends and former colleagues the former member for Narracan. It says:

On 6 April 2022, I was verbaled when Gary Blackwood (former Liberal Party member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly) used parliamentary privilege to defame me in the Upper House of the Victorian Parliament. He questioned my scientific publication record.

Well, you have got to ask about the scientific credentials and the common sense of somebody who cannot be bothered fact-checking what is the upper house of the Victorian Parliament. If these are the scientific credentials of the man that the government is basing its decision to close down Victoria's native timber industry on, you have to ask: what on earth is the government doing? I know that Dr Lindenmayer has got a glass jaw; I know he runs off to the Privileges Committee at the drop of a hat. I welcome him to take this up with the Privileges Committee, because if he can explain why he cannot understand the difference between the Legislative Assembly and the upper house and put that in his book, which he has published and which has presumably been fact-checked and researched the same way I assume that he fact-checks and researches his own scientific publications, then this bloke has got no credibility whatsoever.

On the way out, on this particular topic, when there are only four trees out of every 10,000 that are being harvested and every one of those four trees is being replaced and regenerated it is the very definition of a sustainable industry. It is one which aids carbon abatement, as the IPCC has demonstrated, and for the government to shut that down is just an absolute disgrace.

I will leave this topic with this one quote. This is from a former Labor Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade, of all things. It was on 13 November 2019, and he said:

The government is not in the business of shutting down an industry which is the lifeblood of regional communities and which employs thousands of people.

Unfortunately for the timber workers of Gippsland, Mr Pakula was a big greyhound racing fan. Maybe if you could place a bet on tree logging, the government would have protected that industry too. But no, the government is very keen to protect the greyhounds – the dish lickers – but not so keen to protect good, well-paying blue-collar jobs in regional Victoria.

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I have been able to talk about that issue for the first 3 or 4 minutes because I was going to devote a third of my contribution to the government investment in my electorate of Malvern in this budget, but, guess what, there is none. There is nothing – doughnuts, absolute doughnuts. Did we get the money to reopen my local police station 24 hours a day instead of just 8 hours a day, which Labor has closed it down to? No, we did not. It is closed for 16 hours a day. God help you if you are a woman fleeing family violence and you want to go to a safe place, and you think the safe place might be your local police station and you go there and you get a closed sign on the door telling you to go off to Prahran instead. If the government thinks that is a proper way to treat women in my electorate, I disagree. There is no money for that – no money to reopen our police station 24 hours a day, which it had been for decades before this year and before Labor got its grubby hands on it. There is no money to deal with level crossings in my electorate, which are more dangerous, more deadly and cause more congestion than hundreds of others across the state. Because this government plays politics with everything, particularly infrastructure, my level crossings in Glen Iris, in Tooronga Road and Glenferrie Road are not getting touched at all. We have had hundreds of tram services cut from the Malvern electorate this year alone. My constituents work hard, they pay their taxes and they get less and less from this government every time.

I have been receiving emails from parents who send their kids to local low-fee Catholic schools, and they cannot understand why this government and this budget has discriminated against them. They do not understand how it is fair that because they have a certain faith and they send their children to a school that reflects that faith they should miss out on a \$400 credit that parents who send their kids to a state school get. I will find one of those emails now because I think it is important to put it on the record. I will not mention the name of the constituent because I have not sought her permission, but I will provide the email to Hansard so it can be verified. It says:

I am very concerned by the Allan Labor Government's \$400 School Saving Bonus for all school students in government schools regardless of income, but only for Health Care Card holders in Catholic schools.

As the parent of a child in a Catholic school I believe this payment should be applied equally. Either means tested for all students or available to all students.

It should not be based on which school you attend.

Families in Catholic schools are also experiencing cost of living pressures. This announcement discriminates against my family and punishes me for choosing to send my child to a Catholic school.

This family is punished.

A member: No, they're not.

Michael O'BRIEN: I will take up the interjection. You can be a multimillionaire and send your child to a selective entry state school like Melbourne High and you will get your \$400. If you are a poor, working-class family doing it really tough but your faith is important to you and you send your kids to a local low-fee Catholic school, you get nothing from this government. This government thinks that it is fair; I call it religious discrimination. They would rather give money to Ferrari-driving spivs who send their kids to selective entry government schools than look after those who are doing it tough and happen to be families of faith, and I think that is very much to the government's discredit.

Members interjecting.

Michael O'BRIEN: I can hear the whinges coming from those opposite, but I can tell you what – those families of Catholic and other independent schools will not forget the way this government has treated them. They will not forget it.

There is nothing in this budget for my electorate, absolutely nothing. None of the state schools in my electorate that need funding, that need refurbishment, have received a single cent. Again, apparently it is only my constituents' job to pay taxes to this government, not actually get any investment from this government. We get nothing. We do not get a 24-hour police station. We do not get our level

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crossings removed. We do not get investment in our schools. We get our tram services cut. We get nothing, we get absolutely nothing. It is a disgrace; it is absolutely a disgrace.

Members interjecting.

Michael O'BRIEN: I am glad it is such a source of amusement to the Labor backbench. They think it is really funny that my families – my parents, my kids, the kids of my families in my electorate – get ripped off. They think that is really funny. It just shows you the arrogance of a government that has been in for 10 years – and 10 years too long – because that sort of arrogance is what precedes a big electoral defeat. I cannot wait for it to happen.

So where are we with this budget? Well, from a portfolio point of view, it is another great Labor budget in the Attorney-General's portfolio because they have cut funding to the courts. The budget papers are very, very clear: \$77 million worth of funding to the courts cut over the forward estimates. Again, we hear a lot of chatter from those opposite about standing up for women facing family violence. How does it help them when you increase the backlogs in the Magistrates' Court to get access to a family violence intervention order or a personal safety intervention order? When you cut funding to the courts, you make it harder for people to get into the courts to get access to justice. How on earth are those two things consistent? How can you say you are supporting more women when you are cutting funding to the courts? Yet that is exactly what the government has done. As the CEO of Court Services Victoria Louise Anderson confirmed to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee just last Friday, already 50 to 60 jobs have been lost at Court Services Victoria with more job losses still to come.

Another interesting thing came out from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last Friday when the Attorney-General was before it: two years ago now this government received a report from the Victorian Law Reform Commission on stalking. Stalking is a problem which, sadly, overwhelmingly affects women rather than men, and it leads to death in many cases. This law reform commission inquiry was established at the impetus of Aggie Di Mauro, who is the mother of Celeste Manno, and I am sure members are familiar with the tragic – absolutely tragic – murder of Celeste Manno by a former work colleague who stalked her. She was failed by the system, and that failure that allowed that stalking to continue and to escalate to murder is what led to this VLRC report. This government has been sitting on this final report and its 45 recommendations for two years now – the government received it in June 2022 – and on Friday the Attorney-General said, 'I'm not going to respond to the recommendations.' The Attorney-General said, 'I'm not going to respond to the recommendations; I don't have to.' What a slap in the face to victims of stalking. What a slap in the face to the memory of Celeste Manno. What a slap in the face to her grieving family, especially Aggie Di Mauro. To say they are going to deal with this tragedy by commissioning the law reform commission to undertake an inquiry and then turn around and say they are going to sit on this report for two years and not even respond to it is an absolute disgrace. It demonstrates that all the rhetoric we hear from the government, from the Premier down, about making changes to improve safety for women in this state is just that, rhetoric, because when it comes time for the rubber to hit the road, when it comes time to deliver on outcomes to make this state safer for women, the government could respond to any of the 45 recommendations in that VLRC report and instead the government has said it is not even going to touch them. That is an absolute disgrace.

Our courts have got bad backlogs, the worst in the country. The government has cut funding to the courts. The government will not be responding to the VLRC recommendations on stalking. The government has also cut funding in real terms for IBAC. The government has cut funding in real terms for the Victorian Ombudsman. The government has cut funding in real terms for the Victorian Inspectorate. Any integrity agency in this state gets its funding cut in real terms because this government hates scrutiny. This government know it engages in bad behaviour. It does not want it to be exposed, so it cuts the resources of the integrity agencies and the watchdogs in this state.

In terms of the overall budget, can I say, as the most recent Liberal Treasurer of Victoria, I just need to put a few facts on the record, because when you see the state of the books it shows you what 10 long

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years of Labor budgets have led to. When the government was elected in 2014 Victoria's state debt was under \$22 billion. It is now on track to be \$188 billion. Daily interest was less than \$6 million; it is on track to be \$26 million a day in interest. Just one day of interest on Labor's debt could fix up every single state school in my electorate – every single one. But no, that money has got to go to paying off the interest on Labor's debt, not to actually improving the education of the children in my electorate.

State tax has gone from under \$18 billion to over \$45 billion. Land tax – I know that members opposite think that everyone who pays land tax must be some sort of rich robber baron. It is not the case at all. This government seems to think that people who want to own an investment property to provide for themselves in retirement are rich robber barons. Any family who aspires to have a holiday shack to get away is some rich robber baron. Well, land tax was under 10 per cent of the state tax base in my last budget. It is now 20 per cent – it is double. The fire services property levy was \$600 million in our last budget; it is over \$1 billion in this year coming up – money going to government so they can pay off their mates in the United Firefighters Union.

And look at the credit rating. We used to have the strongest credit rating of any state in the country – a stable AAA credit rating. We have now got the worst credit rating of any state in the country, down to a miserly AA. And what does that mean – when you have a lower credit rating, you pay higher interest rates on your debt. That is the way it works. Your credit rating assesses how much you have got to offer in interest to get people to buy your bonds. That is where we are. After 10 years of Labor government, this state is not better off. My electorate is not better off.

Our kids and their kids face a bleak financial future paying back the accumulated debt from the bunch of wastrels that we have seen in charge of the Treasury benches over the last decade. While speaking to one of my local schools last week, I apologised to them. I said, because of what this government has done, it is going to be your generation that is going to have to pay this back. You are the ones who will have higher taxes, you are the ones who will have fewer services, all because of what this government has done over the last 10 years. If there is one thing that we can say about this Treasurer, the current Premier and the former Premier, it is this: Victorians will be forever in their debt.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (15:43): I am delighted to rise today to speak on the budget take-note motion. Today is a very exciting day for me and my community in Clarinda and for all Victorians, especially Victorian families, because we can see that the Allan Labor government's first budget is dedicated to helping families in Clarinda and across Victoria. This government's priorities are clear to see here: whether it is helping with the cost of living, making sure that our kids can be at their best, record funding for our healthcare system or continuing to invest in more of the services families rely on, the 2024–25 Victorian budget invests in our community.

There are some great local wins here, and I would like to talk more about them, particularly for Clarinda students and their families. We want young Victorians to have what they need to have success in classrooms, and as a former teacher, Acting Speaker De Martino, you know very well the support that this budget will provide. That is why this budget invests in upgrading schools across the state, including, in my electorate, the Clayton South Primary School. This upgrade will deliver \$12.5 million to rebuild the main classroom and build a new playground, ensuring world-class spaces for kids and that our hardworking teachers at Clayton South deserve. I could not not talk about the time that I and the member for Mordialloc delivered the news to the former principal at the time that we had committed to an election commitment of \$12.5 million. I could see on the face of the former principal at the time that he could not believe it, but to know that now it is coming is even more of a blessing.

We were very fortunate to secure some significant election commitments for our local community, and certainly Clayton South Primary School was one of those commitments. Since the election we have been getting on with delivering on those election commitments for our communities, investing in what matters for the people of Clarinda and the services and projects that matter for all Victorians. This is a fantastic outcome for Clayton South Primary School. There have been several principals and

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acting principals over the journey of this funding, from Greg Clement to Dean Napier and now principal Craig Pauwels. Each has given and brought a lot to the Clayton South community and each has been a very strong advocate for this funding and for these upgrades, which will have really important benefits for our students and for the local community. So I say thank you to each of them as well as to the hardworking teachers and staff and volunteers at Clayton South Primary School. This is well deserved.

The good news continues for school families across the Clarinda district with the \$400 school saving bonus to help cover costs. With the current cost of living, covering supplies and extracurricular activities can be hard on families that are doing it tough. Uniforms, camps and excursions – it all adds up. That is why we are providing the one-off school saving bonus to help cover those costs. This \$400 bonus will help make sure that our kids have everything that they need for school, supporting families with children at government schools and families at our non-government schools who need it most. This is very welcome support for families in my electorate, dedicated to help cover the cost of learning essentials and the extracurriculars that make school fun. We will work with schools to make it available for the start of the 2025 school year.

We are also tripling our free Glasses for Kids program. This is another great program, and I was previously delighted to join the prep to grade 3 students at Westall Primary School for their vision screening onsite. I would like to take this opportunity once again to thank State Schools' Relief and their partners for coming down to Westall Primary School. State Schools' Relief's dedicated work has ensured that vision impairments in thousands of Victorian children has been detected and treated early. Importantly, the program has introduced tens of thousands of students to the importance of eye health at a very early stage.

Some of the Westall Primary School kids were really excited; I was there to see and talk to them and to their parents. It will make a huge difference to the learning outcomes for our youngest students. It was great to hear about the difference it will make not just in school but also in everyday life. So it is fantastic to see that initiative being tripled, making sure that even more young Victorians can be at their best in the classroom and beyond. Having already helped 34,000 kids across our state, this investment will help 74,000 more, providing free vision screening and prescription glasses for students who need it most. It is a great outcome for our kids, our communities and our families.

Also being extended is the Get Active Kids voucher program – more great news for families, because we know that learning is not limited to the classroom. We are investing \$6 million to extend our Get Active Kids vouchers, providing up to \$200 to help eligible families with the cost of sporting club registration, uniforms and equipment. That is more welcome news for Clarinda families.

It is a big win for families and education, with more than \$1.8 billion invested to continue building the Education State and building a better future for Victorian children, and these are really important initiatives for the cost of living, which is a major priority in my community. Utility bills, everyday bills and balancing the family budget are constantly on the minds of families in Clarinda and across the state. These initiatives – the \$400 school saving bonus, Glasses for Kids and the \$200 Get Active Kids vouchers – are important assistance for families in my electorate and across the state.

Moving on, in the state's south-east I am very proud of the Allan Labor government's strong commitment to our health care. It is another major priority in Clarinda. It was an honour and privilege to have the Monash Medical Centre in the Clarinda district several years ago before the latest Victorian Electoral Commission redistribution, which saw the Monash move to the Oakleigh district. But for sure my constituents in Clarinda would have the benefit of visiting and seeing the amazing work that has been done since 2018 on the Monash Medical Centre. We completed the \$76.3 million emergency department expansion, delivering additional emergency department beds and extra short-stay beds as well as the mental health, alcohol and other drugs hub and the dedicated children's emergency area, which is fantastic for our youngsters. It is an amazing facility. I have been there many times with the former and now ministers for health. It could not be any better.

We see nearly 5 per cent of the state emergency cases at the centre in Clayton, which is not far away from my electorate, and as always I would like to say another thankyou to each and every one of the amazing healthcare workers and staff at Monash for the wonderful work that they do. They do it day in, day out, and we will continue to support that amazing work, delivering expanded and improved facilities and enhanced service delivery to meet the needs of our growing local community. That means expanding the Monash Medical Centre, with new operating suites, bigger maternity care facilities and a new intensive care unit, ensuring local families have the care they need close to home – a fantastic outcome for Clarinda and for the south-east region.

Since we came to government Victorian public hospitals now employ over 5000 more doctors and over 13,000 more nurses. During the pandemic, when our healthcare system was stretched like never before, we acted decisively, providing record funding to bolster our healthcare system. Since the pandemic the cost of running our health system has continued to increase, but every cent is worth it to keep Victorians healthy. That is why we are making the biggest multiyear investment in our healthcare system in Victorian history. It means that our hospitals will have the long-term certainty they need over the coming years. These investments are very much welcomed in my district and by Clarinda families in particular, and we will continue to invest in and support these vital health services that families rely on.

We are delivering in health care, in education and of course in public transport. The Metro Tunnel will transform the way we move around our city and our state. It will be the most transformational public transport project since the city loop more than 40 years ago. This budget invests more than \$233 million getting passengers ready for day one. I would like to talk more about my local community and how public transport will connect passengers travelling on the Cranbourne–Pakenham line to the five metro stations with more trains more often for families in Clarinda. It also means the Frankston line can go back into the city loop, improving services for passengers. Buses also play a very important role in our public transport network. It is an important resource for Clarinda, helping to connect community members to work, school and each other from various parts of my district, from one destination to another destination. This budget builds on our investments with \$29.7 million to improve public transport services, including improved weekend bus services to and around Chadstone shopping centre. We all love Chadstone, one of the biggest shopping centres in the south-east. This is a great result for our locals with the introduction of the Sunday service and an extended service into the evenings on bus route 800, which is very popular locally.

In my remaining time I would like to touch more on our local wins. The first is the win for our local community legal service – and I also would like to share and commend the effort of the hardworking member for Mulgrave – the South-East Monash Legal Service. The community legal centre does an incredible job, making sure that Victorians can access the legal support they need. We are supporting this important work with \$28.8 million for community legal centres and specialist legal services, including the South-East Monash Legal Service. Funding will support the Sporting Change program. This program partners with schools in Melbourne’s south-east to teach young people about the justice system and supports access to justice with the school lawyer integrated into the school wellbeing team. It is an amazing project, and I am really looking forward to catching up. I commend the motion to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (15:57): It is a pleasure to rise and talk on the take-note motion on the 2024–25 budget papers. With only a couple of minutes before we break, I look forward to coming back and completing my contribution after the grievance debate this arvo. But in relation to this budget, where do you start? This is undeniable proof that we are in a horrible, horrible mess financially in this state. The government simply cannot manage money. Net debt is forecast to hit \$188 billion with interest repayments of \$26 million a day – \$26 million a day; you almost cannot comprehend that. But we have people stand up in this chamber and read off their speaking notes that the world is all good, that there is nothing to worry about because the Treasurer gave his budget speech and the Treasurer

said everything was absolutely fine and dandy. Well, the newsflash that we have got is that things are not so good – they are not so good at all.

We hear government members stand up on that side of the chamber and cherry-pick the few pieces of apparently good news and read from their provided speaking notes about everything being fine. But the reality of it is we all know that it is just putting lipstick on a pig. This government has sent us into an absolute complete financial crisis. I read there were tears in the caucus room there at one stage because people were told that they were not getting what was promised prior to the election. I can sort of understand that, because when you are told you are going to get something you do not want things kicked down the road into oblivion. I think we all come in here wanting to deliver for our individual communities. I can certainly understand that. But it would be nice, as I said on the timber bill a little bit earlier, if people came in here and spoke about what the true situation really is rather than coming in here and holding the lipstick and trying to get it on that pig.

The budget papers actually do not outline that things are ever going to get any better. Those in marginal seats, I would have thought, would be very, very nervous just at the present time, because things are not looking good in the out years. Our state debt is forced to go up and our interest payments are going up again. Things are simply not okay at all.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Cost of living

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:01): I grieve on behalf of all Victorians that are doing it really tough at the moment. We have seen a triple threat when it comes to a government that simply cannot manage money, where all Victorians are paying the price; and a triple threat when it comes to Victoria being the debt capital – more debt than any other state, more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. We have also seen a state that has become the tax capital – more tax than any other state in Australia, more taxes that are sending businesses bankrupt and sending businesses offshore. We are also seeing a cost-of-living crisis, a situation where people are struggling to put food on the table. You hear it each and every day where people are making decisions about what they are doing just to be able to get on with their lives. It has now unfortunately become Struggle Street for many people in Victoria.

When you look at things and where things have gone, a state that embodied the very best of having a go and getting a go, as we heard from our previous Prime Minister, is a state that now is all about having a go and getting taxed and shown the door. That is what has happened for many Victorian small businesses. We have not only seen the triple threat of debt, tax and cost of living, we have more businesses than any other state leaving the country, leaving the state – leaving and going elsewhere and also closing their doors.

Who would have thought that Victoria would be such a basket case – a place that we all cherish, that we love and that embodies the spirit of so many that have come here and made Victoria their home. It is a place where we have celebrated many multicultural communities that have come and really worked hard to ensure they do what they can to provide for their families and for others. I think it would be fair to say that we have a government that not only do not care about those that want to work hard and do not reward them for effort but do the absolute opposite. They turn their backs on them and actually target them for having a go and working hard. I would never have thought that in this state those people would be punished and ridiculed for actually running a small business. Rather than the celebration of those small businesses, we have seen absolutely the opposite.

Under Labor, Victoria is the worst place to run a business in this country, and people are paying for it in droves. A recent article, 'Victoria in need of "significant corrective action" as thousands of businesses flee the state,' in the *Herald Sun* just last week stated:

More than 3000 businesses have packed up and left Victoria since the end of Covid lockdowns in 2021 ...

Those businesses have not come back. Those businesses have the 'closed' sign on their front door. What that does in terms of the repercussions for employment is just far beyond belief, because we know, and so many people in this house and those that have come before us have said, that small business is the engine room of the economy. Labor has sold the engine room of the economy for spare parts. That is what they have done to Victoria, and that is what they have done to Victorian small businesses. I hear from so many businesses time and time again that tell me that it is just too hard to do business. In construction we have had so many businesses that have absolutely said, 'We've had enough.' Not only have we seen businesses that are struggling because of taxation, but we are hearing it from both sides. This is an issue at the supply end, and it is an issue in terms of customers and the cost-of-living end. There is something that can be done about it, and that is absolutely holding this government to account and ultimately in 2026 changing the government. You cannot have more debt than any other state and you cannot have a situation where Victorians are paying \$25 million a day, each and every day, just to pay the interest bill on the debt – and that is not reducing the debt, that is just paying for the debt that continues to skyrocket.

As we saw today, we have the Treasurer, with his own credit card, who keeps on racking up more debt because Labor do not care about money, and Victorians end up paying for their recklessness. We have seen that with Suburban Rail Loop, which is a project that does not stack up, that nobody has asked for, that has not been properly planned, that has been reckless and that even the federal government have turned their back on, and this government is so persistent on spending \$216 billion of taxpayers money. When the government are reckless on major projects like the Suburban Rail Loop, like we have seen in the Metro Tunnel, in the West Gate Tunnel and in the North East Link, there are \$40 billion of blowouts. Forty billion dollars could be spent on a whole range of things. It could get Victoria restarted. It could help with things like tourism, which the government has cut money from in the recent budget. It could build an airport rail, which the government has turned its back on. This government absolutely does not care about business. It does not care about managing money. It does not care about Victorians, and we are all coping it.

Businesses struggle as customers are spending less, and this is a cost-of-living crisis largely influenced by a government that keeps on taxing them out of existence. Whether it be income tax, payroll tax, housing tax, registration for your car, your groceries, the logistics, all of those things cost money. Two-thirds of customers have changed their spending habits already, according to a recent report. What we are seeing is 28 per cent of people are buying less. That means when people go down to their local coffee shop and they meet with their friends on the weekend, instead of having a couple of coffees each and maybe some eggs with a couple of sides, one of the coffees is sacrificed and sometimes there is not even food at all being ordered. I see that in some of my restaurants in Elsternwick. We have got businesses, and I was speaking to one of them only just on the weekend. He was telling me that on Saturday night it was an absolute record. The place was pumping. He could not wait to actually check the cash register to see how much money they were able to make. The local cafe or local restaurant was Goathouse, a fantastic business in Elsternwick. When he counted up the dollars, he was down about 15 per cent. People were there, people were coming, but people were not spending. They are cutting their buying habits because confidence is down, cost of living is up and people just do not have the disposable income to spend. They are buying less, they are buying cheaper goods, they are making decisions in terms of what they buy, and some of them are just putting off purchasing altogether – they are not buying at all. And that is having a huge impact on businesses, a huge impact on the engine room that employs 42 per cent of people; 42 per cent of people are employed by small business.

The private sector does the heavy lifting, but the Allan Labor government want to tax these businesses out of existence. We have seen that happen in so many different instances, and we have seen it also

happen with more Victorian businesses going bust because of interest rate rises. ASIC did a report that showed that Victoria recorded 2372 businesses that have become insolvent, up 29 per cent on the previous year. Twenty-nine per cent more businesses have gone broke than in the previous year under this government. And they want to talk about business confidence when you are seeing 29 per cent of businesses going broke in Victoria. As businesses close in Victoria, businesses in New South Wales and Queensland are increasing. As businesses go elsewhere, in Victoria, businesses in New South Wales and Queensland are opening or coming over there. So why is it that other states can see increases in business confidence and increases in businesses wanting to get going whereas we are seeing the opposite?

Greg La Manna from a South Yarra specialty greengrocer in Chapel Street called La Manna & Sons, employing about 100 people – and this is a migrant business that his family set up; his father migrated to Australia from Italy in 1948 – said that back then their family struggled with every single dollar just to open their first grocery store. He is saying at the moment that the cost pressures, rising wages, higher interest rates and the burden of government taxes and regulation have made it very, very difficult just to turn a profit, and that is what we hear from everybody time and time again.

I know there was even a previous Premier that suggested that people should be getting on the beers, and I know some did, particularly after the horrendous lockdowns, which were because of this government, what happened – the longest lockdowns, the most expensive lockdowns. Other states did not have to go anywhere near that, but we did. But what does that mean, ‘getting on the beers’? Well, let me give you an example – the craft beer association, which is about people setting up new breweries, new businesses, a young entrepreneur being able to say ‘Yes, let me try and build my own brewing business right off the bat.’ Well, many of those craft beer breweries are closing down. They are closing down. Why are they closing down? They are closing down because of cost of materials. One of the reasons that the craft brewery association said they are closing down is basic costs like energy, like gas. If gas prices continue to increase, as materials continue to increase, as labour continues to increase, Victorian businesses like craft breweries are closing. That is the state of repair of this state under this government. Businesses are closing and this government does not care.

This government, as we have seen with a horror budget, record debt, no ability to pay down the debt, record tax, cost-of-living crisis, businesses leaving – what does that mean to many of those seats in Labor-held territories? We are seeing that people in Victoria are missing out. This absolutely stubborn Allan government that just wants to focus on a tunnel for the east at the expense of every other person in the state means that Victorians miss out. Take Greenvale, for instance; Greenvale have abandoned the Beveridge intermodal freight terminal, which is the freight terminal that was going to get trucks off the road. That was also going to help with logistics and transport. That is gone, depriving the north of employment opportunities. Mickleham Road stage 2 is not yet guaranteed even though it would make stage 1 pointless, absolutely pointless. There is almost no bus connectivity, leaving commuters stranded in housing estates. Buses and an airport rail could help commuters get to the CBD – Greenvale neglected. Niddrie and airport rail – we have even heard the Deputy Premier wanting an airport rail – they are not delivering it. The Premier is not delivering it until at least 2033 and counting. And of course the much-needed works of the Calder Freeway have been shelved. The people of Niddrie have been neglected. The people of Greenvale have been neglected.

What about Werribee? The *Western Rail Plan* – scrapped. This is in the Treasurer’s own seat. He has scrapped the *Western Rail Plan*, and there are no electrified trains at Wyndham Vale. That means people in the city get 5-minute services, waiting for a train, while for people in Wyndham Vale it is 20 minutes if they are lucky. In Werribee the national employment and innovation cluster still needs funding and improvements. The people of Werribee have been neglected, and if that is in the Treasurer’s own seat, then heaven help everybody else across the state. In Melton, the *Western Rail Plan* has been scrapped, meaning electrified trains to Melton – absolutely zero. Again, you are waiting 20 minutes for a train at Melton, and you are lucky if you get one. It is crowded. Why does Melton miss out? Why do the people of Melton miss out? In Bass, Wonthaggi Hospital is still unfunded. The

Phillip Island Community Hospital is behind schedule. For tourism in the region, the Phillip Island Penguin Parade boardwalk redevelopment is behind schedule. Why do the people of Bass miss out? Here are just a handful of seats abandoned – marginal seats that you would think Labor would look after to try to save them in 2026: Greenvale, abandoned; Niddrie, abandoned; Werribee, abandoned; Melton, abandoned; Bass, abandoned. These Victorians have missed out because Labor cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price.

Nuclear energy

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (16:16): Thank you for that little fantasy speech we got from the member for Caulfield, otherwise known as Affidavit Southwick. The expression ‘to pull a Homer’ comes from the *Simpsons* episode ‘Homer Defined’. Homer sets off a nuclear meltdown when he drops icing from his doughnut. Unsure of how to stop it, he uses a counting rhyme to guess which button he should press. He succeeds, but when he repeats this at another nuclear power station he is busted for being a fraud, and henceforth ‘to pull a Homer’ means to succeed despite idiocy. I grieve today for the people of Victoria should Dutton or the member for Hawthorn pull a Homer and succeed despite idiocy. The Homer of the north, Peter Dutton, has made it clear that he will pursue a nuclear future, and just last week the Victorian Leader of the Opposition came out as a supporter of nuclear power. When he was asked if he would support the federal opposition leader’s push for nuclear energy on ABC radio this year, Mr Pesutto said:

... nuclear will almost certainly play a part in our energy mix going forward.

Every Victorian should know that come the next election they are voting on a nuclear future. Victorians do not want it, and I can assure you that Anglesea does not want it. If the Homer of the north gets his way, there will be a nuclear power station in old, cold stations like in Anglesea. If the Liberals and the Nationals pursue this idiocy, I can guarantee that they will lose the member for Polwarth – which might be a silver lining. Nonetheless, the people of Anglesea will continue to fight them all the way.

What I find most horrifying about the nuclear trope is the lie of it all, even to those that they hope to inveigle. They do not have anything to offer and only know how to campaign on fear – and here we go again while the opposition stirs fear in our communities. They are grasping on community concerns about transmission lines and renewable energy projects. They stir up fear in our communities and harvest their data. There is a proposal for a wind farm near Lethbridge in my electorate, and I put a constituency question to the Minister for Planning today to help the community understand the consultation process. The member for Brighton put out a flyer with no Liberal Party identification encouraging people to sign a petition using a QR code. When you go to that petition it lands on the member for Brighton’s page. But what I find the most laughable is that it begins ‘Don’t let a Melbourne minister decide your future’. To the people of my electorate: when you hand over your details, it is to a shadow minister in sunny Brighton, even further from our home than Melbourne – our very own Karen, the Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change. Do folk in his is electorate know that he is actively campaigning against renewable energy?

I grieve today for the policy put forward by those on the other side for nuclear energy, so let us look at some of the lies that have been espoused in this space.

The SPEAKER: I remind the member that the word ‘lie’ is not acceptable language in the house.

Michaela SETTLE: Dr Alan Finkel, Australia’s chief scientist from 2016 to 2020, explained that:

Large nuclear power generators cannot ramp up and down rapidly like batteries or peaking gas generators. This reduces their compatibility with a predominantly solar and wind powered electricity grid.

By the time any nuclear power stations are built, our transmission lines will be at capacity with renewables. So in effect the opposition are tricking the folk that they are trying to get on board through

fear tactics about transmission lines and renewable energy. Nuclear will not change the need for transmission lines.

The reality of nuclear just does not stack up. It is the most expensive form of energy, it takes a long, long time to get online, and it is toxic. Let us never forget the three-eyed fish of Homer Simpson. Dr Alan Finkel explained that wind energy costs \$7 billion per gigawatt. Now, compare that to the Hinkley Point plant under construction in the UK, where the costs for nuclear power will be \$27 billion per gigawatt. That is the difference: \$7 billion from solar and renewable energy compared with \$27 billion for nuclear. It just does not stack up.

The CSIRO's recent *GenCost 2023–24* report confirms that nuclear is the most expensive form of power generation available, yet the National Party conference still voted in support of it just last weekend. The cheapest forms of power are wind and solar, even when they are coupled with the cost of energy storage and transmission, and that includes the cost of building the new transmission and firming up capacity through batteries.

There are days in my electorate when the wind can certainly chill your bones, but I am very glad that it is powering our state. Our old coal-fired generators are unreliable and they are leaving, and we just do not have time for this nuclear fantasy. I will just give you some examples. A new plant in France was originally expected to be completed in 2012, and 10 years later it is still not producing electricity. Another plant, in the UK, started construction in 2016, and it is still nowhere near finishing, with their latest estimate being at around 2027. So if we look at the proposal by the Nationals and the Liberals that we should replace our renewable energy program with nuclear power, it is just based on a fantasy – a fantasy that it can be done in time to service Victoria. They would have our lights go out, those on the other side.

One of my favourite family photos is of me at my very first rally, which was a nuclear disarmament rally, when I was less than a year old, back in 1965. The community have been protesting about nuclear for a long, long time, and I do not think that they are going to be happy to see those bans swept aside by the Liberals and Nationals either here or federally. Given that lack of social licence, any of those power stations would take even longer to build – beyond those in the UK and France.

On the other side they try to talk about small reactors as the solution, but let us face it: they do not stack up because they are completely untested. There are no small modular reactors operating in the UK, Europe, Canada, the US or any other OECD country. There are no SMRs under construction or approved in the OECD, and there is no data to support any claims about how much SMRs will cost when deployed as operating power stations. They are asking us to trust them on a wing and a prayer on something that cannot be built and will cost more than three times the amount to produce the same gigawatts. Again they are creating fear and throwing out lines but with no basis in fact. There is great community concern about safe storage and disposal of high-level radioactive waste. Here in Australia we have already got low-level nuclear waste and, guess what, there is no disposal site in Australia. There are over 100 temporary storage sites – not disposal sites, temporary storage.

Top nuclear waste expert Emeritus Professor Ian Lowe says waste is currently kept in cupboards and filing cabinets in universities and hospitals. We are not managing the low level we have now. How is this going to work in the Liberals' nuclear future? Will a toxic waste dump be approved in Hawthorn or Brighton? No, I bet you it will not. I bet you they will send it out to the regions where they have been stoking fear endlessly amongst communities about renewable energy, and instead they will send them a great big nuclear toxic waste dump. Something we know about the other side is they do love to tell us that the market knows best, so here is another one for them, again from Alan Finkel. Let us not forget that he was Australia's chief scientist for many years. He says:

The various operational, political, and cost challenges faced by the nuclear industry have led to nuclear's share of global electricity generation falling from more than 17 percent in 1996 to 9 percent in 2022.

As usual, the Libs would have us turn back the clock with some fantasy that at another time it was going to be a great idea.

But enough about them. Let us talk about the alternative, the real and ongoing work that has been done by this government to ensure our energy future, and this stuff is based on fact. We smashed our 2020 emissions target of 15 to 20 per cent. We achieved 29.6 per cent, and in 2021 we achieved a 32.3 per cent reduction. We do not just talk about climate change – we deliver it. We are decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, and since this government was elected in 2014 we have cut emissions by more than any other state. We have the strongest climate change legislation in the country, and Victorians voted overwhelmingly for the next steps in our ambitious agenda. In the previous contribution from the other side there was lots of talk that those in government should be more concerned about some of our marginal seats, and I would suggest that perhaps those on the other side should look to their seats. Ask their seats how they feel about nuclear energy and how they feel about nuclear waste in their electorates. I think you will find that many of them would object pretty strongly.

In ‘Homer’s Odyssey’ Homer stages a protest about the lack of safety at the nuclear power plant, and Mr Burns offers Homer a new job at the plant as the safety inspector, which would have a considerably larger salary than his old job as a technical supervisor. I can only imagine that this is the game plan behind the member for Hawthorn’s support for nuclear energy. He is looking for a job from his mates when the affidavits start piling up. Let us remember that we need a strong energy future in this country, and this government has continually worked towards lowering emissions and providing a stable energy grid. For those on the other side to come in and just lob a bomb basically into the community around nuclear energy and all the joys that it will bring I do not think is working. It is one of the most extraordinary tactics I have ever seen in politics to suggest to your very voter base that they are going to have a nuclear power station in their electorate.

Really today I grieve for Victoria that we need to continue to have a debate around nuclear energy. Since I was born, and that was a long time ago, we have been protesting in Victoria against the use of nuclear energy. I have every confidence that Victorians will continue to stand up and say, ‘We do not accept this,’ and they do not accept it because it is expensive, it will take forever and it is toxic. How about they get behind us instead of creating fear in our communities about renewable energy? Why don’t they support it? Why don’t they work towards a clean, green future for Victoria instead of striking fear in people’s hearts and suggesting what really is a pup? There is no way that you can justify to anyone in Victoria that a nuclear power station would be of any value. So in this grievance debate I grieve for Victoria that they are being sold this pup. I grieve that they have no opposition that they can look to for ideas. Rather, again and again they look to the opposition, the alternative government, and all they see is fearmongering. It is the only thing they know how to do. It would be great if the opposition would bring a policy to us. They have tried with nuclear and it is a pretty strange one, but it would be great to see something from the other side instead of fearmongering and disturbing regional communities.

I care passionately about my electorate. I am there every day, unlike the member for Brighton. I travel that electorate every day, and I care for that community. Renewables offer a future for all of Victoria. One of the local farmers talked to me about the fact that it makes his farm an absolute going concern and protects his farm for future generations, rather than changing the land use there. Rather than trying to scare people, why don’t people get on board and support this government’s renewable energy program.

Regional Victoria

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:31): I rise to grieve for regional Victoria. The member for Eureka invited this side of the house to get behind her and her government. Can I say we do not want to go into the abyss of what this government is doing to Victoria or to regional Victoria in particular. We do not want to have the debt that we have in this state. The issue that I specifically want to grieve about is the fact that it is decisions of the Allan government that are driving the cost-of-living pressures

here in Victoria. As the Premier would spin it, it is the war in Ukraine or it is international events that are leading to the cost-of-living pressures in Victoria. It is Labor Party Allan government policy decisions that are driving the cost-of-living pressure on Victorians. It is their issue with gas. It is the fact they have got a ban on gas and that no-one wants to explore for more gas that is driving up gas prices. It is driving businesses out of this state.

There was an article in the paper this week about Kagome, which is a tomato-processing plant, beetroot-processing plant and carrot-processing plant in Echuca. Kagome is an international conglomerate. They have got businesses in California, they have got businesses in Japan and they are in other parts of the world, and they are seriously looking at their investment in Australia and how they can actually keep profitability with the price of gas as it is for them to do their food processing. That story goes on right around the state because the decisions of this government are putting that cost-of-living pressure on households and business.

Power prices are exactly the same. The previous contributor talked about renewable energy and talked about transmission lines. By the time we build the transmission lines that are needed in Victoria that they are talking about for renewable energy, the cost of power will have gone up more because it is power consumers that are actually going to pay for those huge transmission lines right around the state – and as I read it, that will not necessarily underwrite the stability of the power grid here in Victoria. It is Allan government decisions that are driving the cost-of-living pressures that we have in this state.

The other thing I want to talk about is – and I have said this to regional people – do not give this government the excuse that there is no money to pay for things. It is decisions of the Allan government that mean there is no money to pay for the things that are needed in regional Victoria. If you think about the \$40 billion in cost overruns on the major projects here in Melbourne, \$40 billion is hard to comprehend as to how much money that is, but there is a very simple equation. VicRoads have 23,000 kilometres of freeways and highways in Victoria. If you say it costs \$1 million a kilometre to upgrade those roads, to re-sheet those roads, that 23,000 kilometres of road would be fixed up with \$23 billion. Forty billion dollars in cost overruns, \$23 billion to fix the roads in Victoria and then there is \$17 billion left over to fix the health system or \$17 billion to contribute to more police or \$17 billion to build the Warragul hospital in the member for Narracan's seat. There would be \$17 billion left over after all the roads had been fixed if you had not wasted \$40 billion in cost overruns on major projects.

Again we think about being asked to follow the government down a particular path. Who was the minister that was in charge of those major projects? Who was the minister? It was the now Premier. How can we expect the now Premier to lead us out of the malaise that Victoria finds itself in when it was she, as a minister, who oversaw this \$40 billion blowout in major projects here in Victoria? I grieve for the fact that regional Victoria is suffering because all that money has gone. All that additional capital infrastructure is going to go into the Suburban Rail Loop and some key projects in Melbourne but not into regional Victoria. In the budget there is \$98 billion in the forward estimates for infrastructure projects. I might do a quick poll of the house: how much money do you think is for regional Victoria out of that \$98 billion? Two billion dollars. The government put out a press release crowing how great it was that they are putting \$2 billion of infrastructure into regional Victoria when they are putting \$96 billion into metropolitan Melbourne. They are treating country Victorians with contempt. The issue around our roads could have been solved very easily if the government had not wasted \$40 billion on cost overruns on major projects.

The next issue I want to grieve for from regional Victorians' point of view is the housing crisis that we find ourselves in. I think every member in this house would know that there are people in their community that cannot get a house to live in – they cannot get a rental and they cannot get public housing. The public housing waiting list just continues to get longer and longer and longer. I think the waiting list for public housing is about two years now – if you are on the priority list. If you are not on the priority list, who knows when you will get a public house. It is government decisions – it is Labor

Party decisions and it is Allan government decisions – that are driving the housing shortage in Victoria. It is the tax regime that is driving this particular issue.

Juliana Addison interjected.

Peter WALSH: A small fundamental taxation principle of economic argument, for the member that wants to keep interjecting: when you have got 55 new or increased taxes in the state and 27 of those 55 new and increased taxes are taxes on property, that means that people do not want to invest. Somehow those on the other side of the house think that private capital and private enterprise are a magic pudding that you can just keep taxing and taxing and taxing, and somehow those taxes will be spent wisely by this government. No-one has any faith that this government will spend taxes wisely. Look at the \$40 billion in cost overruns on major projects. Is that spending Victorian taxpayers money wisely? No, it is not. If you actually want to help solve the housing crisis in Victoria, you reduce the tax burden on private capital to build the houses that are needed here in Victoria. Over a third of the price of a house and land package is state government taxes and charges. If young people who are saving up for a house knew that they were paying the Allan government more than a third of the price of their house and land package, they would be horrified. They would be absolutely horrified, because somehow the Allan government think that people are a magic pudding you can keep taxing and taxing and taxing and there will be no consequences.

We are seeing that people who had rental properties are selling them. They have got the land tax bill. They are saying, ‘Why do I want to own this when I’ve got this huge land tax bill?’ I talk to real estate agents. People are selling rental properties in this state and investing their money particularly in Queensland because they have got a more attractive tax regime. It is the rust bucket state of the 1990s. People are leaving Victoria to do business interstate because of the policy decision of the Allan government and because of the taxes that the Allan government is putting in place, particularly around property. We need to free up private enterprise to solve the problems, because government will not solve the problems. We have seen how much the cost blows out on any government project on those particular issues.

Juliana Addison interjected.

Peter WALSH: Can I suggest to the member for Wendouree that she might go back to night school and do some basic study on economics and how you get private enterprise to invest to solve the problems. You do not tax them so they leave the state and are no longer here to actually do something for Victoria. A simple night school lesson on economics might be very useful for the member for Wendouree.

The other thing I want to grieve about is the health crisis that we find ourselves in in this state. The communities that I represent find it abhorrent that their health services in the future may be bundled together and run from Bendigo. It equally applies to Gippsland, it equally applies to north-east Victoria and it equally applies to the south-west of Victoria. We have actually seen an example of this where Grampians Health is now run out of Ballarat and services are leaving regional Victoria. The members for Ballarat might be happy because they have now got the services that were delivered further west in Ballarat and people have to drive there to get a service. You have only got to talk to the member for Lowan, who was the former CEO of the Edenhope hospital, and she has described all the services that have left that hospital, have left Horsham, and people now have to travel to Ballarat.

There was a myth painted that if you put this together as one great big business, somehow there will be more services delivered in regional Victoria. The fact is that is not happening. The fact is that the example of Grampians Health is flawed. That is what is going to be forced on the rest of the state, and I find that abhorrent on behalf of my communities. How can the Mildura health service, 2 hours away from Bendigo, be run from Bendigo? How can Swan Hill hospital be run from Bendigo? How can Echuca hospital be run from Bendigo? How can the fantastic new hospital in Boort, which we built as a government, be run from Bendigo? Why should the local board and the local involvement be taken

away to actually have a board in Bendigo of most likely Labor Party apparatchiks running those hospitals right across north-west Victoria?

There is a real issue with the health services in this state for the minister to say, 'This is how much money you're getting. It doesn't matter that you've got more clients coming in, more services to deliver; you're not getting any more money.' If they cannot deliver the services with that amount of money, those services are going to be lost. I think that is wrong and very bad for the health of our regional communities, because no-one can determine what the demand is over a 12-month period. There is a set budget. If I am a hospital CEO delivering services and I get my budget on 1 July and by 30 March I have run out of money, I cannot deliver any more health services in my area. That is effectively what the Minister for Health has said. It does not matter how many people come through the door and it does not matter if there are issues in my community; there is no more money to actually deliver that. The way this government have funded health services, they have always run them far too lean, and they have relied on a letter of comfort at the end of the year to cover that particular deficiency.

Can I say that our communities – my communities, communities in Gippsland and communities in north-east Victoria – will be absolutely outraged if this government amalgamates all those health services into one health service that is coming out of the major regional cities in those areas, because you take away autonomy and you take away community involvement. A lot of those hospitals were originally built by the local community fundraising, running cake stalls and doing all the things that were necessary to get those health services started decades ago. Effectively what they are going to be forced to do in the future, those health services, is start running cake stalls again and start doing fundraisers down their main streets to pay the bills on those hospitals so they can actually get the services they need in their particular town.

The livability of our communities for the people that live there, to attract more people to fill the jobs that are available in a lot of these particular communities, is driven by a couple of key fundamentals. The first one of those is having a good health service in that particular community, otherwise people are not going to want to live there. The next is, obviously, having schools. In a lot of cases the jobs are already there, but it is hard to get people to come out and fill those jobs, because they look at the community. Now with all the publicity of the government saying, 'We're going to merge your hospitals. We don't really care about your hospital; you're going to be told what to do by someone 200 kilometres away,' people that you are trying to attract to come to those communities to fill vacancies will go, 'What's going on here? The Victorian government doesn't care about those health services. I'll reconsider whether I move to that particular town.' If they actually take a trip out there to have a look at the town to get a job, they are just as likely to blow a tyre, they are just as likely to smash a rim on the potholes that are on those particular roads, so it is not necessarily an attractive place to go out there.

So the key message that I would like to deliver on behalf of regional Victoria through this grievance is: we actually want to see a fair share of money spent in regional Victoria. Twenty-five per cent of the population of Victoria lives in regional Victoria. We deserve to get 25 per cent of the capital budget – not \$2 billion out of \$98 billion – and to not have our health services merged and to not have our roads in such a deplorable condition that people find it dangerous. It has been quite often said that to drive a car in Victoria it actually has to be roadworthy. You would think the government would make the roads roadworthy so you could actually drive on the roads. They are spending more money on 40- and 60-kilometre-per-hour signs to put on the roads than they are to actually fix potholes. I grieve on all those issues on behalf of regional Victoria.

Nuclear energy

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:46): I grieve for my fellow Victorians today, and the reason is that here we are in Victoria decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, doing the right thing and transitioning to a cleaner energy future for benefits of cost, because we know that renewables are definitely the cheapest form of energy – and also a very rapid structural implementation is enabled

through or can be facilitated with renewables when it comes to that transition – but instead they just throw out thought bubbles like nuclear: ‘Let’s just go with nuclear.’ And we know not only that the state opposition has supported this, but also when asked if he would support the federal opposition leader’s push for nuclear energy on ABC radio this year Mr Pesutto said that:

... nuclear will almost certainly play a part in our energy mix going forward.

This was on ABC radio, 4 March 2024, just to be precise. What does this actually mean? I should unpack why we are actually so strident in terms of backing in clean, renewable energy in Victoria. Well, we like to listen to scientists. The CSIRO’s recent *GenCost 2023–24* report again confirms that nuclear is the most expensive form of power generation available, and the cheapest forms of power, which I said from the outset, are wind and solar. Now, what is really important here – and I think is certainly something that piqued my interest when listening to the report that was fed back from the recent *GenCost 2023–24* report itself – is that they factored in all aspects. They were looking at storage and otherwise in terms of the cost element.

So to be clear, the cheapest forms of power are wind and solar, even when coupled with the cost of energy storage and transmission, because that is really, really important. We have to be really practical when we are looking at costs and comparing in this context. This includes, I should say, the cost for building new transmission, because I am just picking up on some comments that were made in the chamber about transmission – of course it is incredibly important to be able to get the energy where it needs to go efficiently – and firming capacity, like batteries, to complement the new, renewable energy projects. So you can see that due diligence has been undertaken when making these very precise comparisons between different forms of energy that can be taken up for our great state.

We know that we have abundant sunshine and wind, and so we certainly have a competitive advantage when you are looking at what forms of energy we choose to invest in for our great state. You can see that there are a lot of sound reasons for why we are investing so aggressively – but for the right reasons – in renewable energy. And, yes, Victoria already has the lowest wholesale power prices in the national electricity market. Why is this? It is because of our record investment in renewable energy over the past eight years. We have form, but it is good form, and it is certainly, as you can see, backing in the very sound investments in clean energy.

I want to refer a little bit further to the CSIRO’s recent report, because according to their cost estimates, constructing sufficient nuclear capacity for a 1600-megawatt capacity power station approximately the size of the decommissioned Hazelwood power station would cost \$25.6 billion. But it does not stop there when you are looking at the cost, because we know that there are some who like to just throw nuclear as a nice little distraction point – maybe they think it is actually feasible – but it is really important to unpack exactly how this has unfolded across the globe. We actually can see the reality of what nuclear – implementing and building a nuclear reactor or a whole system – would cost our country. We know the costs for a large-scale nuclear plant in a GenCost report were based on figures taken from projects in South Korea, which are considered amongst the lowest in the world. So you can see there that the CSIRO has been very diligent in terms of making sure that they do the tightest possible comparison so as not to in any way unnecessarily inflate or exaggerate what might be the potential costs were we to go down this path here. Thankfully we will not. I can honestly say that our government will not go down the nuclear track. That is absolutely a path that we will not go down. We know that Victorians do not want that path either; they have very much backed in the investment in renewable energy.

Certainly a big part of the excitement about bringing back the SEC – we were very up-front about it at the election; no-one was shy in any way, shape or form – was because of the opportunity that it facilitates to actually expedite the investment in renewables and transition for our state. Just coming back to this cost factor, because this is absolutely vital, because we are looking at the cost of living and saving Victorians money when it comes to energy and investments, South Korea’s costs, relatively speaking, are lower than other nuclear nations because they have maintained – and this is actually

another really interesting point – a continuous build program over an extended period. This is not actually what has been proposed by the opposition, because it is more – and I am going to have to paraphrase a little bit here – ad hoc: a few reactors here and there around the traps. The problem with that is you are not getting the scale-up which would actually facilitate better economies of scale, so to speak. That is actually really vital when we are talking about something as critical as the choices we make in terms of investment in energy.

A continuous build program also makes it easier to provide skilled labour as there is a clearer career path for workers. So, again, you can see that when we are looking at this very important issue of energy, we are looking at the whole picture from the outside – not only accessing the relative resources, whether it be sun and wind as is the case with renewable energy investment, but also what sort of workforce and what skills are required in order to do these ambitious but necessary rollouts. None of these things are true of Australia. The coalition are proposing to build maybe a handful of reactors, so there is no scale and no existing workforce and not much incentive for workers to move to that industry. We know that to manage something as complex as a nuclear reactor you are going to have to have a very elevated skill set, and I say that with the greatest respect, because of the complexity of managing not only the reactor but the safety aspects as well. Despite the CSIRO's take on these generous assumptions, nuclear still comes in – get this – several multiples more expensive than renewable energy. So you can see why there are various very critical parameters when you are looking to critically evaluate, 'Okay, what is the best option for Victoria into the future?'

This is another thing that I wanted to factor in as well, because I originally quoted what it would cost to build a large-scale nuclear reactor. Experience in other countries demonstrates that initial cost estimates are almost always far too low. The UK is currently building a new 3260-megawatt nuclear plant in Somerset known as Hinkley Point C. It provides a valuable lesson in creating a nuclear rod for your back, literally – pardon the pun. The plant was initially estimated to cost \$30 billion – that was back in 2016 – or £18 billion, to be precise. The most recent estimate is that the project will now cost \$61.2 billion, or £32.7 billion. In anyone's language we can see that there is some significant embellishment, and I am not saying exaggeration; these are actual costs. But we can see that, on anyone's terms, that is a huge blowout.

I will give another example. The most recently completed nuclear plants in the US are Vogtle 3 and 4. Vogtle was built as a pair of reactors, not a single plant, in the hope that this would increase – I am coming back to this point – scale efficiencies and reduce costs. Instead the project ran over by seven years and cost more than \$25 billion more than originally budgeted. The cost overruns were so significant that Japan's Toshiba Corp, which was at the time the owner of Westinghouse, paid, in Australian dollars, a \$5.6 billion penalty to be released from their contractual obligation to deliver the project at a fixed price. Even having to pay that for a penalty seems pretty significant in anyone's terms. All told, the two reactors cost close to, in Australian dollars, \$50 billion.

We can see that the economics just do not stack up. I remember when I was on the inquiry into nuclear prohibition when I was in the upper house it evaluated so many of these aspects, including costs et cetera. We could see at that time that with costs alone it just did not make sense, let alone the fact that climate change is well and truly underway. We simply cannot wait for the time that it would take to build a full-scale nuclear reactor.

I am going to give another example, because people often say, 'Oh, France, they've nailed it. It's all perfect there. Nuclear – perfect.' But a new plant in Flamanville in France was originally expected to be completed in 2012. Ten years later it is still not producing electricity, and yet the French – and no disrespect – are held in the highest regard. People who love nuclear tend to like to espouse, 'Oh, France, they've got that mastered,' yet we can see here that they have had significant problems in terms of actually getting that energy online, and at the end of the day people need energy now.

Australia would not have the economies of scale, so we are not going to be able to make it affordable, and we really do not have time to wait 15 years to be able to build a large-scale nuclear reactor. Part

of why there is the delay and why it takes so long is that you need so many tonnes of concrete and structural mechanisms, if I cut to the chase, because of the risk, because it is a highly toxic form of energy, and it really does not make good sense. And of course to date there is no long-term storage facility for high-level nuclear waste. Nobody has nailed that around the globe. Nobody has mastered that, so that does not give me any confidence – when you think how long nuclear bombs et cetera have been around the planet, the fact that even today they have not nailed the very basic thing of where you put that highly toxic, highly radioactive nuclear waste.

I can assure you, and I am going to speak for the people of Albert Park, I do not think they are going to want to take that. I am very confident they will not, but by the same token, I do not want to inflict it on any other electorate either. I do not think that is fair. Whether it is the Latrobe Valley, whether it is out in Werribee or wherever it is, I do not want to do that. I am thinking of all Victorians, not only the constituents in my own electorate. Naturally the community are concerned about where that waste is going to be stored, because if it gets into groundwater et cetera how do you stop the damage? I know even in France they have a lot of problems because they are running out of space. They have to keep digging deeper and deeper and deeper to put this stuff underground, and you cannot leave it there forever, because they put it in these barrels and every so many years you have got to dig up the barrels and change the packaging and put them back down. Who wants to put a worker through that? I personally do not want to inflict that on workers either.

Brad Battin: Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Housing affordability

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (17:01): Today I rise to grieve for Victorian renters who are struggling to make ends meet and are being offered no solutions by their government. The average rent has increased about \$200 a week since the pandemic, and in my electorate of Melbourne, where about 50 per cent of people rent, it is even worse – double the state average. In the last year alone landlords have increased rents by more than 14 per cent, nearly four times inflation. Wages have not risen 14 per cent in a year but rents have. Anglicare's latest rental affordability snapshot found there is not one single affordable property or even one single room in a share house that is affordable for a person on youth allowance or JobSeeker nor is there anything considered affordable for single parents with a child receiving youth allowance or JobSeeker. Likewise, we are failing those in the community living with a disability. There is just one property in the entire state that is affordable to someone on the disability support pension.

If this was not bad enough, just this week we heard that somehow the rental crisis is about to get worse. Investment group Jarden found that rental inflation is expected to increase beyond the current 15-year high and hit its highest level since the global financial crisis, and it will basically keep getting worse until at least 2026. Yet Labor's budget did nothing for renters. There were no day caps for short stays to free up the 48,000 investment properties that are sitting on Airbnb right now in Victoria. We could just free up a few thousand of those by putting a cap on Airbnb so that renters or owner-occupiers could live in them long term, but no, Labor did not want to do that. The budget had no new public housing, although Labor keeps pretending that demolishing public housing towers and privatising the replacements is the same thing. And Labor's budget had no rent freeze. We now know from recent figures that have come out that if Labor had listened to the Greens and implemented a rent freeze back in March 2023 – just kept rents at the already inflated levels that they were in March 2023 – each renter in Melbourne would have saved about \$2500 over the last year. Do you know what that would have meant for Victorian renters? The Greens do, because we actually thought to ask them. We asked the renters who are being affected by these rent increases.

Today in my grievance I want to spend most of the time reading out stories from renters – stories about the situations that they are in – because I think it is important to bring their voices into this place where decisions are being made about their lives. One renter says:

I lost my job at the end of March this year, and got no redundancy as they'd hired me as a permanent employee two weeks before they announced the closure. The same week, my rent was increased for the second time in 3 months, by \$40 per week. If a rent freeze had happened, that \$2500 could have meant that I could pay my share of rent until I got a new job. It would've changed everything.

Another renter said:

I am paying approximately half my income on rent. I am ... lucky to have a roof over my head at 88 years of age and living alone ... I make no demands on my landlord for fear of increase in rent. I feel precarious.

Another renter said:

\$2,537 would help me afford food, pay my bills and rent and allow me to not feel like I'm drowning in financial stress for about 3 months. I suffer from mental illness and –

this money would mean –

I'd be able to afford a couple of appointments with a clinical psychologist which would be nice.

Another renter said a rent freeze would mean:

I wouldn't be moving out and be homeless in two weeks as our landlord has not made adequate repairs, which have been a health concern, while increasing the rent by \$120 a week ... because the government doesn't give a ...

and then they used an expletive, which I think was entirely appropriate to describe the situation. Yet another renter said:

I am a renter, and a savings of \$2,527 would enable me to pay and provide for essential things that I cannot afford to, such as:

- ... school books/school fees ... uniforms
- winter clothing ...
- ... bills during winter ...
- proper food groceries
- GP and medical costs
- dental costs

Our current landlord increased rent last year, and now has given us another Notice of Rent Increase again (\$306 extra/month).

This is despite the fact that we are ideal tenants, always paying rent on time and maintaining property in good condition. The landlord did not carry out any improvements on property to deserve such a rent increase, plus the fact that it's a RentSafe compromised property, and we went without essential repairs for long periods of time.

I am challenging this notice via the Tribunal.

Regardless of outcome the landlord will give us notice to vacate after hearing, only because as renters, we have exercised our rights to challenge notice of rent increase.

It's only a matter of time now before me and my family becomes homeless, unless there is an immediate rent freeze and a possible eviction freeze ...

These stories just keep coming. They are endless. A few weeks ago I held an event at a pub in Carlton where we invited renters to come and share their stories with us. We heard from young people who told us they had their rent increased every single year, and not just by inflation, not by the same amount that their wages increased, but by 20 or 30 per cent year on year. They felt they had no choice but to accept it, because otherwise they would spend every single weekend in lines of 40 or 50 people long trying to compete for another rental and they would probably end up having to pay the same inflated rent as if they had just stayed put. I was shocked that almost every single young person in the room

had an experience of taking a maintenance issue to VCAT or challenging a rent increase at VCAT. They had to wait months and months for an outcome, and many of them had their rent put up or had been evicted after they had made complaints about maintenance issues.

Renting is not just something that people do for a few years. It is not just something that people do as a student now before they are able to buy their own home. These are people in their 20s, 30s and 40s with good jobs who are paying half their income in rent and also living in precarious situations, where they enrol their kids in school but have no idea whether they will be able to keep living in that suburb where they send their kids to school or whether they will have to move next year just like they did the year before. It is not just affecting people's hip pockets; it is affecting their ability to build a life, to be part of the community, to put down roots. It is affecting their mental health and ability to live their lives because they are being forced to move every year, which in itself is such a stressful thing. I am sure everyone knows how stressful it is having to move house, especially when you are given just a few weeks notice. People feel they have no stability in their lives, and they are having to spend all their spare time worrying about where they are going to live.

And it was not just young people at this event either. I had a woman come up to me in the street the other day. She was in her late 50s. She told me she had been a lifelong renter and is a single mum. She has a good job in community services, but it is not super well paid being in the community services sector. She has taken time off from the workforce, like a lot of people do, to raise her daughter. She has always worked. She has always had enough to pay her rent, but not quite enough to save to buy a home. Now she is looking at what happens when she retires. Her landlord has just said he will put up her rent. She told me she will pay whatever he asks, because this is her community. She does not want to move. But when she retires there is no way she can afford the rent that she currently pays when is on the pension or with the meagre amount of super that she has been able to amass. And she is worried about what happens to her daughter. Will she ever be able to afford a stable home given that she cannot help her out through the bank of mum and dad?

I want to say to those people out there who are looking at their kids, worried that they will never be able to afford a stable home, who are feeling bad and guilty that they cannot give them money to buy a home: it is not your fault. It is not your fault that you cannot afford a home despite working so incredibly hard. It is the fault of governments who have put in place deliberate policies to lock people out of the housing market. It is the fault of Labor and the Liberals who have cared more about the investor class, more about the wealthy people, than they have about putting a roof over everyone's head. The housing system is broken, and it is breaking people. And there is actually something that Labor and the Liberals could do about it if they chose to. They are simply choosing not to. I know that Labor pretends this crisis does not exist. Or they say it is a problem but supply is the issue, but then they completely ignore the 48,000 homes that are on Airbnb that could be brought onto the market in an instant if they properly regulated that industry. Labor says it is a problem, but they do not act like it is a problem. The Premier has used words like 'people are choosing to rent', like it is a lifestyle choice, not something people have been forced to do due to active choices that governments have made.

But these are real people. These are actually real people that I am talking about, and they are suffering. In fact it is 30 per cent of people in Victoria who rent – real people. It is 30 per cent of Victorians whose rental stress has gotten so much worse since the pandemic. And these renters cannot just go and buy a home, as much as many of them would like to, because house prices have climbed further and further out of reach. Rents go up, and it erodes people's savings that they might have used to buy a home. Something has to change.

Many landlords might be doing the right thing. Many are not. But this is not about pitting one group against another. It is about the fundamental right of everyone to have a roof over their head. I fundamentally do not believe we should have a society where it is easier for someone to buy their seventh home than it is to buy their first. I do not believe society is fair when our government gives tax breaks to people who own multiple investment properties when others cannot afford even one

home. Surely the measure of a fair society is whether everyone has the basics to live. Shouldn't we at least make sure everyone has one home before we give tax handouts from all working Australians to people to buy multiple homes? Because what we are doing is we are taking tax money away from workers and giving it straight to property investors. That is actually what we are doing.

The thing is that there are solutions available here. The Labor government is just choosing not to use them. These solutions are available at all levels of government, including the state government. During the pandemic Labor did implement freezes on rents, and it worked. The ACT has a rate cap. It works. Other countries have rate caps in one way or another. They work. In Canada, China, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Singapore – this is not just one or two places – New York, California, even in that beacon of capitalism the United States of America, they regulate their rent increases.

The other thing is the tide is turning. Thirty per cent of Victorians rent. Millennials and gen Z are becoming a bigger voting bloc than any other generation, and they will not stand by as governments who have so severely screwed them over continue to do nothing about the rental crisis. They will not stand by while Labor and the Liberals are actively supporting policies to lock them out of the housing market, to lock them out of being able to afford to buy or rent a home. People are fed up, and the result will be seen at the ballot box in the next few years. So if Labor actually want to show they care about people, even if they just want to show that they care about saving their own skin, they will do something to fix the housing crisis. They will regulate Airbnb. They will put a freeze and a cap on rents. They will advocate to their federal colleagues to actually get rid of negative gearing and capital gains discounts, which are completely screwing over younger generations. The rent is too damn high, so why won't Labor actually do something about it?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the Honourable Chris Pearce, the former federal member for Aston. Welcome, sir.

Nuclear energy

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:15): I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when there was the Zoom call from Canberra to Melbourne: 'It's Peter here. We're going nuclear.' I imagine a moment of disbelief in the Leader of the Opposition's eyes before he said, 'Yes, Peter.' The meeting finishes. Somebody says, 'Oh, great. Now we've got to tell the Nats.' They call the Nats. Do not worry; they are all over it: 'We just voted for it. No dramas.' So they have adopted a new policy. All right, let us go to the comms team: 'We've got a job for you. We've got something that's super expensive to build and that has higher power prices. It's dangerous and it won't be ready in time. Can you sell that, please, to the Victorian public?' No wonder the comms director quit.

Let us go through those points: it is dangerous. That is the first point of the comms director's brief that I would like to focus on. I would like to help the new comms director. It is dangerous: the waste has to be protected for 100,000 years. So it is not just dangerous for us or our children or our grandchildren or our great-great-great-great grandchildren. One hundred thousand years – that is how long it is dangerous for.

I used to live in Kakadu National Park, where we had the Ranger uranium mine, which I am sure many of you would remember was fiercely objected to by the Mirarr people, who own the land there, and by many activists. Even some from down here in Melbourne travelled up to Kakadu. It was a big deal for Australia to have a proposed uranium mine. Anyway, it went ahead, and in the time that it has been operating there have been more than 200 leaks, spills and other incidents. So we might think, 'Chernobyl was a long time ago. Technology has improved so much since then. We'll be fine. We'll be sweet.' Well, I can tell you that in 2013 an acid leach tank collapsed there and 1 million litres of radioactive ore slurry spilled, and the area had to be evacuated. Prior to that, in 2004 they somehow had the processing water connected to the drinking water, and the water uranium levels were 400 times the Australian standard. And we want that in Victoria, something so dangerous?

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: Where would you like it, member for Sandringham? Would you like it in your electorate?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Lauren KATHAGE: Sorry, that is right. Where would you like it, Deputy Speaker?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Reflecting.

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes, thank you. I wonder where, for example, the member Sandringham would like the power plant to be. Would he like a power plant in his electorate or would he prefer the nuclear waste to be in his electorate? It is one of those difficult either/or games – do you want the plant or do you want the waste? I would suggest that those on that side who are proposing to have such dangerous things imposed on our community might like to discuss it with their community first and see what their community thinks about that.

A member interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes, a big town hall discussion. I think their community would be shocked to hear that they are even countenancing such a thing. What a shock. That is the comms director's first dot point filled in.

The next area our new comms director for the Liberal Party will need to focus on is the cost to build. We know that the estimated cost to build plants that are currently in construction just goes up. We know that those opposite hate major projects that become more expensive, so wait till they hear how much the Hinkley C blew out by. In two years the cost increased by \$30 billion – a \$30 billion increase in two years. We know that it has become so expensive to build that I think now they are saying something like \$60 billion for one plant. And it is not going to be quick either – you will not be able to enjoy the radioactive glow for many, many years. When it was announced in 2008 they thought it would take 10 years. The current estimate is 2031 and it is getting later and later. We know that we cannot have nuclear in Australia any time before 2040, we know that coal plants are going offline before then, and we know that we are going to have renewable-powered energy by then. So they are going to have to find a way to explain to the Victorian public why they are willing to spend \$30 billion-plus on something that we do not need.

Because of that expense of building such a thing and the way that the power is generated, it is actually the most expensive power that you can expect people to pay for in their bills. This side of the house is all about making power bills cheaper for Victorians. We do that through lots of different ways. Obviously changing to renewables is one way that we are keeping prices down. We have just seen again another Victorian default offer which is \$100 less. We have got the cheapest wholesale power on the mainland, and that is one of the reasons why we are going for renewable energy.

When they come in and think about the cost of nuclear energy, they also need to think about the cost of the clean-up – how much it is going to cost to clean up the inevitable nuclear waste spill – because in Fukushima it cost hundreds of billions of dollars to clean up what happened there. So when they are adding up on the back of the envelope the cost to Victoria of going for nuclear, please add a few hundred billion dollars for the clean-up. The cost of the energy from the Hinkley nuclear power plant that I was talking about started at £43 per kilowatt, and now that has climbed to £191 per kilowatt. It just gets dearer and dearer and dearer, and that is the opposite of renewables, which get cheaper and cheaper and cheaper. Our former chief scientist has said that the trajectory of renewable energy power prices is just down, down, down. It is getting cheaper, and this government is absolutely focused on cheaper power for Victorians.

We have all of that info ready now for the new Liberal Party comms team, so how are they going to sell this? The comms director's first suggestion, pointing to Canberra – blaming Peter Dutton – that is a classic 'I don't hold the hose, mate' Liberal approach, blaming Canberra. All right, they have got a new idea – 'How about we try misinformation?' 'No, we tried that with COVID.' 'What about

fearmongering?’ ‘I mean, that’s par for the course, right, fearmongering, but unfortunately focus group feedback is that people are less scared of solar panels than nuclear waste, so that’s not going to work either.’ ‘All right, okay, look, we need to get the youth on our side. How about we start a nuclear internship program?’ It sounds like a joke, but it is true. Those opposite in the upper house have started a nuclear internship program –

Members interjecting.

Lauren KATHAGE: I know. I was shocked too, member for Warrandyte. Why go after the poor youth with such poor science, radical ideology and what will definitely cost their families countless amounts of money and potentially wipe out future generations of this state? That is exactly what I said: ‘Won’t someone think of the youth?’ Well, I will. I have got a message for those opposite: no comms director is going to be able to sell this pup. This is a joke, and the people of Victoria are not laughing. They are not laughing. You cannot sell this to them; they are too smart for you.

Victorians have voted for this side of the house for a reason – for many reasons, actually, and I would love to take you through some of those reasons. It is because we set targets and we smash them. We have the strongest climate change legislation in the country, and Victorians have overwhelmingly voted for the next steps in our ambitious agenda. We are decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, and since this government was elected in 2014 we have cut emissions by more than any other state. Our targets are delivering the most rapid reduction of emissions in Australia, which is unlocking billions of dollars of investment and creating thousands of jobs. We already smashed the 2020 target, and in 2021 we achieved a 32.3 per cent reduction in emissions. And we are backing things up with massive investments. We have got almost \$2 billion in programs to reduce emissions. We are really putting our money where our mouth is.

We have got our nation-leading offshore wind target, which we debated in the house a few weeks ago, which will have 2 gigawatts of offshore wind come online by 2032, with 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. That 9 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2040 will happen before they could even flip the switch on a nuclear power plant coming online. The solar projects that we have announced will help us power 100 per cent of government operations. Police stations, hospitals and metro trains and trams will all be totally renewable – but you will still need to tap on and off, please.

There is also support – and this is probably what, at the end of the day, I am most proud of and what the average punter is most interested in – for Victorian families to have cheaper power bills. I have gone over some of the ways we are doing that in terms of changing to renewables, but we are also doing it through the Victorian energy upgrades program, which means that people can come off expensive forms of power and appliances and they can save I believe – the minister will correct me, I am sure – something like \$1200 per year with solar. That is a massive amount of money. Do you know how many school shoes that is? That is a lot of pairs of school shoes for families and a lot of school uniforms, so it makes a real difference to families if we can bring power prices down.

They say the basis of everything is good health, and the reality is that renewable energy is clean energy. Nuclear energy is not good for the health of Victorian families. We do not want to be, in our state, surrounded by nuclear waste for hundreds of thousands of years. That is not going to help us to be the nation-leading state that we are. We would be a joke. The joke would be on us from Canberra. I think perhaps Canberra has identified the weakest link in that chain of Liberal state branches. They have identified the weakest link, and it is in Victoria. Unfortunately, it sounds like the three-eyed fish here has taken that bait hook, line and sinker. I tell you what, that fish is being reeled in, and it is not going to taste good. Nobody wants that nuclear here.

Our government is the government that is bringing back the SEC. Our government is bringing the extra 59,000 jobs that come with the SEC, with 6000 apprenticeships. I do not know what the member for Eildon will be doing by the time those nuclear power plants come online, because that will be

decades from now. God forbid those opposite should ever be in government and bring nuclear power to the state of Victoria.

Government performance

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:30): If only Victoria was a nation-leading state. The state of Victoria and the things in Victoria are pretty grim. You only have to talk to the person on the street, the average person on the street – you could actually probably have a couple of sneaky conversations with Labor backbenchers – and you would know that they equally think the state of Victoria is quite grim. Those backbenchers are just leaving at the moment; they are the ones I am talking about.

We have only got to have a bit of a look at the last couple of budgets. In 2023–24 Labor were in such a big hole they did not know how to get out of it without doing the big tax grabs, so they absolutely put all of these nasties in there to get as much tax from people – anyone that they thought was doing it easy, which is nobody. But they still went for the big grab there, and we are still feeling those impacts, and I will talk about that in a minute. Then the current budget, the 2024–25, has minimal tax reform. There are still a couple of extra ones in there, but it reduces spending and has cuts left, right and centre.

We see that the government still are addicted to spending. They just cannot help themselves. The net debt is rising, and the debt has consequences. When you have got a debt that is \$188 billion projected, it is extraordinary. One billion dollars used to mean something, but now it really does not mean something, and that is really scary. For the government it is always somebody else's money so they do not have to worry about it so much. But in the next three years we will be paying \$26 million a day for the interest on the debt. That is an incredible amount of money: \$26 million a day. Mansfield needs a new hospital, and within a week we could have that new hospital if we did not have this level of debt. I do remember the Treasurer saying that while interest rates were low, borrow, borrow, borrow, but the thing is you have got to pay it back at some point, and I think that they just missed that in finance 101. Yes, while it is cheap, great. But you have got to pay it back, and if you do not pay it back while it is cheap, and the interest rate goes up, it causes all sorts of strife.

What does the government do? They have to revenue raise, and they revenue raise through these taxes. What does that mean? Through taxes, money is diverted elsewhere. We have got to pay this interest, and the taxes are being taxed to pay the interest, not just to pay the debt off. I do not think they are very interested in paying the debt off. But they are taxing, and this loss is a loss of services across the board, and it is a lack of infrastructure. There are 55 new and increased taxes in the last decade when the government said no, they were not going to do anything, and we all knew that was a furphy. We knew that was a Pinocchio commitment and that the government cannot walk away from those sorts of things, but they seem to bury them.

Look at the tax grabs that we have got. At the minute we have got an additional \$21.5 billion: \$7.8 billion in a land tax grab – whoa – and \$10.1 billion in land transfer taxes. We have got the fire services property levy whacked up – farmers, a 60 per cent increase. That is extraordinary. It makes it very difficult to do business. We have got the COVID tax on there.

I want to stop for a minute and talk about small business. Every now and again the minister pops up and mentions that small businesses are the heartbeat of the state, and they are. Most people are employed in small businesses. They are not employed with large corporations. So who owns small businesses? It is mums and dads. A small business might only have two employees. It might be a sole trader, or it could have up to 20 or so, where the turnover and the payroll bill, I suppose, starts to get around a million or a few million dollars. But these small businesses are absolutely doing it tough. The cost-of-living crisis that we are in, in Victoria particularly, makes it exceptionally difficult. We have got inflation still on the way up. We have seen some ordinary numbers in the last little period, but everything has gone up. All of the costs of goods that they are looking to sell or to make something with, all of those base costs have gone up. Insurance has gone up – we want to talk about power. Council fees and permits – having a little sandwich board out on the footpath is a cost that small businesses complain about regularly, because it is just another cost.

We have land tax and we have rent. There are some businesses who may own their own building. They may own a shop. They may lease a shop. They may own a factory. They may lease a factory. They might have a shed. They might lease a shed, some of them, depending on your set-up and your structure and what money you have been able to invest in it. If you have to rent it, a lease has gone up. And why would that have gone up? It is because your landlord has been hit with a whopping land tax bill. I spoke to a company out in Dandenong. They owned a factory and they leased a factory. The factory that they owned, the land tax had not just gone up, but it got revalued before it went up. It went from \$1.2 million to \$2.4 million – it doubled in price in 12 months, or what they thought the value was. It doubled, and then they get the increase in land tax on that. This is exceptionally difficult for businesses to make ends meet when you have these sorts of costs that are being imposed on them. So if you own it, like this person did – they owned one and they leased one – they had that increase in land tax that they had to pay, but on the other property, the owner of that property had that increase and then would pass it on. This is what happens. These taxes get passed on to the consumer, and it makes it harder for everybody.

I want to have a look at the NAB quarterly business survey from December 2023. It said:

Business confidence turned significantly negative in the quarter –
the last quarter last year –

as the outlook became increasingly clouded.

The chief economist Alan Oster made a number of points, but one of them that I want to pick up, because I have not picked this up for small business, is the cost of employing people. It is really difficult. He said labour availability remains a significant issue for a third of firms, and wage pressures remain the top concern for businesses. When you have got staff, if they are casual, their costs go up, or however many hours they do, and what happens is the business owners stop using those people. They will use their families. They will use people who are under the age of 18 to get the lower wage bill. I spoke to a business owner a few months ago at a pizza shop, and I asked him what was the biggest cost increase that he had, and it was cheese, surprisingly enough. He said, ‘But I can’t pass on the cost of that cheese’ –

Members interjecting.

Cindy McLEISH: Pizzas – they use loads of cheese. ‘I can’t put the prices of my pizzas up, because I still need to sell them.’ The amount of money that he was making then was impacted significantly, as was the cost of employing staff, so who did he have working for him? It was Mum and Dad. Here was a guy who would have been mid to late 30s. He cannot afford to absorb the increased costs. He cannot put those up, because he saw everyone in the area really struggling. He still wanted to sell his pizzas. He had his shop. He had the power prices. He had the rent that he had to pay. So what he did was get his parents in there to help him. Also Alan Oster said, notably, the slowdown in demand has meant firms appear to have had less scope to pass on costs to consumers. That is a really good example, that pizza guy that I have just mentioned.

I want to turn now to insolvencies, because insolvencies in Victoria give us a really good indication of how easy it is for businesses to continue on. It was very recently that the *Australian* reported on the number of insolvencies; I think it was 27 March. The Victorian data for 2022 was 1041 insolvencies; for 2024, 2304. That is 1263 additional businesses in that two-year period. It kept escalating. Businesses cannot make ends meet, so what do they do? They have to pack up shop, and that is really quite scary. ASIC data confirms that the construction industry, and this is no surprise, has by far the most company failures. We hear this all the time, and I doubt if the government is really concerned about this increase in company failures. I do not know if they accept any responsibility for the construction industry having the most failures. I do not know that they even recognise that excessive red tape and intolerable tax burdens are causing so many business failures. I do not think the government have really got their eye on the ball there.

I want to have a look at some of the small businesses that have closed, that have packed up shop. In Geelong, in Pakington Street – which has been a great street – we keep seeing businesses close down. One of the new businesses was a toastie food truck that went to bricks and mortar. This business was called We Are The Press. It started up late last year, and they have closed up. They put that down to a ‘combination of everything’. What does that mean? It means:

... interest rate rises and cost-of-living pressures, as well as untenable power and gas prices.

I wish the member for Tarneit had a really good understanding of businesses, because I can tell from his comments that he has got no idea. This business owner has had to close the doors. And I might say I find it quite disturbing that members of the government think this is a funny story, to hear about all of these businesses that are going broke, the insolvencies that have doubled in two years and what has happened in Pakington Street in Geelong.

Members interjecting.

Cindy McLEISH: I will be making sure that they know about your comments. But he said they were not alone in facing the struggles. His friends and colleagues have been forced to close hospitality venues in recent times. This was in an article in the *Geelong Advertiser* on 18 May, only a couple of weeks ago. It is quite disturbing.

I want to talk now about sole traders. Who are sole traders? Sole traders are often tradies, hairdressers, freelancers or consultants. It could be your physio, it could be another allied health professional. One of the stats that came out of the Henry Sole Trader Pulse in March 2024 was particularly worrying for women. We know that sole traders are responsible for putting their own superannuation aside, so when things get tough, what happens? 31 per cent of women, alarmingly, are deferring their super contributions because they cannot afford them. There is already an issue for women not having enough superannuation as they get older because they have often taken maternity leave or time out of the workforce with families. Here we are and sole traders are deferring putting money into their superannuation because they cannot afford it. I find that really quite disturbing.

I want to talk about unsustainable energy costs. In March 2024 the chief executive of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Paul Guerra said that if the Victorian 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.

What have they done? Let us have a look. Out of Albury, Seeley International, Australia’s largest gas heating manufacturer, described the ‘inexcusable anti-gas obsession’ of the Victorian government as a nail in the coffin for its Albury factory located on the Victoria–New South Wales border. It has packed up. It will close. It employs approximately 85 permanent and 40 casual staff members. Where are they going by the end of next year? Over to Adelaide. Toilet paper manufacturer Sorbent made a similar decision last year, with Asia Pulp and Paper citing the challenging macro-economic environment, including unsustainable energy costs, among other things, having forced them to go offshore and move many of their brands to Indonesia.

I think people in this chamber would not like to hear that, not at all. We also have a bit of a retail recession, and this is about consumer confidence in Victoria. I think it is quite telling we have had an article in today’s paper, and it cites Swinburne professor Sean Sands, who is from their School of Business, Law and Entrepreneurship. He has talked about Victorian shops, restaurants, builders, brewers – they could continue to bleed and go broke for another two years; already I have given you the insolvency stats. He has warned of this retail recession, which is looming:

People can’t afford to spend as much as they have in the past ... they’re not eating out as much, they’re not buying as much.

I think this government has levers that they can pull, and they are pulling the wrong ones, because they are taxing everybody to death.

Nuclear energy

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (17:46): I rise this evening to grieve for the fantastic communities of Anglesea and the Latrobe Valley under the dangerous and reckless nuclear fantasies of those opposite. In 2022 Liberal Party mouthpiece and employment agency the Institute of Public Affairs stated that reliable, affordable baseload power from coal and nuclear are the only options for Australia's future energy mix. Additionally, in June that year several coalition MPs, including one anonymous frontbencher, spoke to the *Age* indicating support for nuclear or stating that nuclear power should not be completely ruled out.

In November last year a sort of fringe-dwelling conservative Liberal and factional warlord, member for Western Victoria Mrs McArthur, stated in the other place that nuclear:

... is the cheapest and most reliable zero-emission clean energy source of minimal impact.

We will go into some of the impact a little bit further along. She claimed to be technology agnostic, which is just a downright lie, and called for a lift of the nuclear ban and called for state investment in nuclear supply. You would think this kind of nuclear showboating would be the sort of thing coming from a far-right factional fringe – to be fair, the Victorian Liberals probably are not too far from that – but it is the kind of thing that is quite happy living in an opposition that does not care about its electorate. Surely there are enough sensible, smart and switched-on people among those opposite to temper the nuclear ambitions of a few testy right-wingers. Surely cooler heads might prevail before the opposition goes nuclear. Surely the Leader of the Opposition is not so loose on the reins that he cannot even pull the brakes on something so electorally suicidal. Well, the Leader of the Opposition must be deficient in either brains or backbone, because he has decided that nuclear, and this is a quote, will almost certainly 'form part of the energy mix going forward'.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition: where will the Leader of the Opposition place his dangerous and risky nuclear reactors? Will the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs McArthur and the member for Polwarth –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, such ludicrous claims surely must only be made by substantive motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have been listening carefully to the member, and I counsel members on getting close to imputations on members.

Dylan WIGHT: Will the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs McArthur and the member for Polwarth visit their constituents in Anglesea and explain their dodgy nuclear ambitions to the residents of the Surf Coast? Where would the Leader of the Opposition plan on storing toxic and cancerous nuclear waste? You can bet your bottom dollar that it will not be Hawthorn; it will not be beside the residents in the leafy eastern suburbs. Will it be shoved out in the volcanic plains on the suburban border of my electorate in Tarneit? How late will the Leader of the Opposition's nuclear pipedream come online? Will it be seven years late like the Vogtle 3 and 4 plants in the US, or will be over 12 years late like the plant in Flamanville in France?

With nuclear power, nuclear reactors and nuclear power plants there are significant moments in history where we have seen how incredibly dangerous and volatile they can be. In fact we had the member for Bulleen stand up, I believe it was last year, and speak on this. He actually gave a really, really good speech on this subject and spoke about Chernobyl. But there are so many more examples than just that. I have had the pleasure to travel to New York, and not just New York City but a little bit further north, up near Peekskill and Yonkers and a couple of other places. There have been a couple of nuclear power plants in history along the Hudson River there and one at Indian Point. In 2005 there was an incident there, and over 200 gallons of radioactive water ended up in the Hudson River. Think about that: over 200 gallons of radioactive water into the Hudson River. Imagine what that does to that ecosystem there in New York.

We are talking about a nuclear power plant in a place like Anglesea. Where are we going to store the nuclear waste? We are talking about a nuclear power plant adjacent to pristine ocean, incredibly close to the Otway National Park. What are we going to do, build a pipeline from the power plant there near the old coal-fired power station and, what, just put a pipeline for nuclear waste out into the ocean? I mean, it is absolutely absurd. In fact in New York only last year the state required legislation to stop company Holtec from dumping radioactive waste into the Hudson River from that decommissioning Indian Point power plant. Is this the sort of environmental vandalism that we would like to import into Australia? That is the question for those opposite.

Another really important point is: how much will this cost? How much will the Leader of the Opposition's expensive nuclear fantasy run over budget? Will it be \$25 billion like Vogtle or –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on standing order 118, again the claims that are being made by the member on his feet are attaching attribution of something which the Leader of the Opposition has not in fact asserted, and the member on his feet is in fact attaching attribution to something which is simply not true. So again, under standing order 118 regarding imputations and personal reflections, if the member on his feet wishes to cast imputations upon the Leader of the Opposition, he is very welcome to do so but by a substantive motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member, if I understood it correctly, was referring to another member who is not in this house, and therefore it is a matter for debate.

Brad Rowswell: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I clearly heard the member for Tarneit refer to the Leader of the Opposition, and therefore I respectfully reassert my point of order to you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, my recollection was it was a federal member that was being referred to, not a member of this Assembly. Therefore it is a matter of debate.

Dylan WIGHT: Where was I? Will it run \$25 billion over like Vogtle, or will it run \$30 billion over like Hinkley Point C in Somerset in the United Kingdom?

To understand the disregard of those opposite for Australia's environment, health and safety, you only need to look at their party's track record when it comes to nuclear. I was not born in 1958, but there was some nuclear testing that happened at Maralinga in South Australia. The royal commission into the nuclear testing at Maralinga found that then Liberal Party Prime Minister Robert Menzies had approved the English nuclear tests without first receiving independent Australian scientific advice on the hazards to humans or the environment. The Australian federal cabinet at the time was kept in the dark by Menzies about key aspects of the nuclear tests, and the atomic test agreement by the two governments was done in retrospect after the first test had even occurred. Australia was forced to accept UK assurances on the safety and likely fallout, lifespan and hazards of the atomic tests, without an independent scientific assessment.

I think it is incredibly important when we talk about these issues to think about history and to go down memory lane with respect to those issues and the blatant disregard – flagrant disregard – for Australia's environment and Australia's safety that is right there in the history of the Liberal Party. It also serves as a really healthy reminder as to how dangerous this technology is. Over 60 years after Maralinga the vegetation is still cleared in a 1-kilometre radius around the site, and the ground is so sterile that it is still impossible for plants to grow. The highly reactive radioactive particles in the soil can also leach into the soil and groundwater, which are then absorbed by plants, wildlife and humans. This is a really clear example, on our own soil, of how incredibly destructive and dangerous nuclear material is, and it was a Liberal Party Prime Minister all the way back then that did this to that area.

I would also consider the Runit dome nuclear waste site in the US Marshall Islands. This concrete dome covers a pit which contains over 87,800 cubic metres of radioactive waste left behind by the US military after World War II. This site is at sea level – pretty similar to what a nuclear plant would be anywhere around Australia, because they are on coastlines – and it is only metres away from the Pacific

Ocean. The concrete dome is chipping and cracking, risking plutonium leakage into the Pacific Ocean and contaminating the food and water of locals in the Enewetak Atoll. Just imagine the additional compounding risk then caused by global warming and sea level rise. Just imagine all sorts of these nuclear containments leaking into our ocean and environment. It is not just the nuclear power plant or reactor itself that poses the risk, it is also the storage of the material after the fact. There are significant examples, several examples just like this one, of why this is such a bad idea and should not even be considered by any sensible government in this country.

This is the sort of risk that those opposite want to bring onto our shores. Are those opposite really willing to condemn the beautiful Surf Coast to this type of nuclear risk – either the Surf Coast or the Latrobe Valley? There has been recent research done that I think says it is pretty clear that the residents in these areas do not want this risk either. Why would you? Are those opposite really willing to place a nuclear reactor right next to the pristine and unique temperate rainforests around Anglesea and so close to the Great Otway –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again, I have been listening quite closely to the member for Tarneit, and the assertion that he is making is simply factually untrue. I therefore again highlight to you standing order 118. The claims made by the member for Tarneit are in fact wrong, and he should not be making them. If he chooses to make them, he is welcome to, but again, only by substantive motion.

Paul Edbrooke: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, in support of the member for Tarneit, what the member for Tarneit is bringing to this house is factually correct. He is reflecting on comments made by people in this house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: At the risk of repeating the Speaker from earlier today, it is not the Speaker's job to tell you exactly what to say or judge it. The member is within the rules of debate.

Dylan WIGHT: Do those opposite really want to create such an untenable climate risk with the storage of nuclear waste in our state? Whose land are they willing to poison? I know I will certainly stand up against those opposite if they ever determine to place toxic nuclear waste anywhere near my electorate in Tarneit or the Werribee River catchment. I would like to see a show of hands from those opposite who would not do the same. Who among those in the Liberal Party room would like to store that nuclear waste in their own communities?

A member: Send it to Bev; she will have it.

Dylan WIGHT: Yes, probably. It is a horrible idea. *(Time expired)*

Question agreed to.

Motions

Budget papers 2023–24

Debate resumed.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (18:01): It is good to have a bit of encouragement from the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation at the table. Just before the break I was commenting that anyone who thinks that this is possibly a good budget is trying to put lipstick on a pig, and it is just under no circumstance on any measure a good budget. When the Treasurer comes in here to give his budget speech and he tells us how financially astute he is and how things are travelling really well, he has fair dinkum got to be drinking his own bathwater if he thinks that the state is going that well. It is not.

I want to work through a few of the portfolios. We will start off with health. We have a health minister saying that no more funding will be provided to hospitals at the end of the financial year should they overrun their budgets. So country hospitals that have as an absolute priority providing services to their

community now have this black cloud hanging over their head that if they go over budget, they are not going to receive compensation for that. Their paramount priority is to provide health services to our rural and regional communities. They should not be asked to do that with the threat hanging over their head that if they go over budget, they will not be looked after. It has been a long-standing practice that the government of the day will meet budget shortfalls at the end of the financial year for our hospitals, and that should continue. That threat should not be put in place. Fancy making that threat to our hospitals when we are going to be paying \$26 million a day in interest. We cut funding to cancer research by 70 per cent while we are heading towards paying \$26 million a day in interest. That is proof that the government is not managing money well. They cannot manage money. How the Treasurer can sugar-coat that into 'things are travelling well in this state' is beyond anyone's reasonable level of comprehension.

Mental health and the locals that were promised – only 15 of 50 have been rolled out. One of those is in my patch, one of the 15 that have been rolled out. It is offering telehealth appointments only. The second rollout has been put on hold. The Treasurer cited staffing and that 'We are pausing this rollout because we haven't got the appropriate levels of staff.' Wouldn't you factor that in before you made that announcement? Wouldn't you consider, 'Have we got the staffing levels to make this commitment to those communities?' That did not happen, but what is annoying people most is that there are no solid plans to address the workforce shortages that the Treasurer refers to. We have only got motherhood words. We have got no secure plan to fix the staffing shortfalls. We have just pushed the opening of those mental health locals out.

We have also pushed back the timelines for the establishment of the eight regional mental health boards. Surely that has got to be a financial decision. Mental health has been in crisis for years. Every time we raised that in this place over the last four years, every time we raised mental health issues on this side of the house, we were told that the royal commission was going to come up with the answers. Well, the royal commission is now over. The recommendations are in, and it is time for action, but the government is not acting with the speed required. You have the recommendations, but you are not able to implement them. I go back to the fact that if we did not have this level of financial burden, it would be being done a lot better than it is.

The cost of living is soaring, and the response to that is taking away gas connections to new homes as an option in the market at a time of a cost-of-living crisis. I am actually with the Deputy Premier on this one. I heard the Deputy Premier's commentary saying that he has got gas on in his house and he will be continuing to use gas. I am with the Deputy Premier on this one. I will be using it too, and people who are building a new home should be able to have the option to connect to gas, like the Deputy Premier and I have had with our own residences.

The public sector wage bill has grown. This is not what it is – it has grown \$40 billion, just an incredible, incredible figure. How are you ever going to manage that level of growth? The population has not increased commensurately to warrant that level of growth in the public service. The public service growth should be matched to our population growth. Public service growth being commensurately in line with population growth makes sense. With minimal population growth, a massive explosion in the public service makes no sense, especially when we have the level of debt we have at the present time.

In my own portfolios of disability and seniors we have had significant budget cuts. We covered that off in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week, but really there were no answers from the ministers in relation to what services have been cut out of those two portfolios.

Roads maintenance funding remains 16 per cent below what it was in 2020. Our roads are falling to bits; they are getting beyond repair. They really need a very, very significant investment – a massive investment. Yes, funding went up slightly – it did – but we are still not at the roads maintenance level that we were at in 2020. We have got more traffic hazard signs up than ever before. Truckies and bus drivers who have been on the roads for decades are saying our country roads are the worst that they

have ever seen, and proof of that is the amount of vehicles that are being damaged. The amount of vehicles being damaged on our roads is unprecedented, and that actually proves the point that our road conditions are as poor as they have ever been. And like everything, in the out years of the budget there is no plan to fix it.

We look at families – early childhood sector supports cut by \$79 million, wellbeing supports for schoolkids cut by \$34 million, child protection cut by \$141 million, family violence service delivery cut by \$29 million. Fancy cutting family violence and child protection at this time – at this time of all times. I mean, read the room. They are areas that need more investment, not cuts. Lowered targets on social housing builds – in a time of a housing crisis we have lowered the targets.

In tourism, a portfolio important to regional Victorians and the state as a whole – a \$286 million cut to tourism and major events funding. I got an email today from the owner of a local pub saying, ‘What am I going to do, because people’s expendable revenue has gone out the door with the cost-of-living crisis? I’m getting less people coming in and having a meal. I’m getting less people coming to the pub because, simply, things have got too tight.’ So at a time that our tourism businesses need support, what have we done? A \$286 million cut and a \$17 million cut to the destination Victoria program. We have had a \$393.9 million cut to visitor economy initiatives; those tourism cuts are part of that bigger figure. They support regional industries, regional tourism, regional events and infrastructure builds in regional areas – \$393 million cut at a time when we have a cost-of-living crisis.

Agriculture has been cut yet again. You know, our poor old farmers – when they are going to need help and support we have agriculture cuts, and that has been year on year I think for at least the past two and possibly three budgets.

Then we have broken promises. Apart from mental health, the Commonwealth Games and the fast rail to Geelong – and there are many, many more that I could talk about – the free kinder rollout that was promised has been scrapped and pushed back. We had the full rollout put back to 2037. The last will be coming on board in 2037, according to the budget. Talk about kicking the can down the road. We will all be out of here by then. We will all be out of this place.

Members interjecting.

Tim BULL: Well, Kim Wells might still be here, but I doubt there will be many other members still here in this chamber when that free kinder finally gets rolled out.

We are not delivering the amount of elective surgery that was promised. We have got a 40 per cent rise in elective surgery waiting lists at a time when they said we would have action. Now, Minister Thomas said at the time – and she was widely quoted in the media on this – she would accept nothing less than the target. And now she is running away from that. She is backtracking on that and making all these excuses. But how do you go from saying publicly, ‘I will accept nothing less under any circumstances’ to now accepting something less? I tell you what, it just does not make sense. The budget also revealed major blowouts on projects, again proving Labor cannot manage major projects and cannot manage money.

We are handing out \$400 credits to students of some families but giving with one hand and taking with the other – a \$400 credit at your school for some families while we are taking away from you with the fire services levy, which has gone up. Waste levies are going up. Land taxes are increasing, stamp duty and payroll tax. I think the \$400 credit to families was something to talk about in the budget.

A member interjected.

Tim BULL: When you have increases – I will take up the interjection – in the fire services levy, that impacts those same households. When you have waste levies, it impacts those same households. They have got to pay the waste levies. They are impacting everyday households, families with kids.

MOTIONS

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Your fire services levy – everyone has to pay that. Your waste levy – everyone has to pay that. So we will give you \$400 here, and we will take more off you with this hand. It makes no sense whatsoever.

My electorate also had some wants and needs, before I finish. Maffra and Orbost police stations need upgrades. We need the fire stations at Lakes Entrance and Metung, but the budget delivers nothing. There is no money for these police stations but \$4.1 million for the scoreboard in Geelong. I am not sure we have got the right priorities.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Tim BULL: It is about priorities, though, member for Polwarth. This budget takes us back to the years of the Cain and Kirner governments, but the debt levels of that era are just nowhere near in comparison to what we are facing now. But we are going to have people stand up here and try to paint a positive picture, and there is just no way you can paint a positive picture on this.

I wanted to talk about the wild dog program having no certainty, which is going to have a major impact on our farmers, but I do have an adjournment coming up later so I might put that one off until then. We cannot try to paint what is an absolute shocking financial situation for this state into something good. This budget is a horrible budget.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (18:13): I rise with pleasure to speak on the budget take-note motion. But before I begin, I would like to take a moment to set the record straight for the member for Malvern. In his earlier contribution, he stated with great passion and ferocity that there was nothing in this budget for the Victorians living in his electorate, but that could not be further from the truth, because for the residents of Malvern who may need to visit the emergency room, they can be assured that there is \$572.5 million in this budget to expand hospital capacity, including at the nearby Monash Medical Centre emergency department. It is not that far out of the district of Malvern. Also at the same Monash Medical Centre – which by the way, I will give them a shout-out because unfortunately we have visited them a few times – we are spending \$5.11 million to continue providing inpatient treatment and care for those struggling with an eating disorder. And anyone who may need surgery or is starting a family can rest assured that we have allocated \$535 million in the budget for hospital upgrades, including funding for the Monash Medical Centre tower expansion project, which will deliver a new seven-storey tower with new operating suites, birthing suites and pre-op and post-op beds. On top of all of this, that tower expansion is going to create 1500 jobs, some of which may actually be for the good people of Malvern. I just wanted to clarify that.

I would like to pick up that the member for Gippsland East was listing a number of taxes and levies that are increasing but did mention payroll tax. I did interject at the time because it is not going up. It is coming down. The threshold is going up, which means those with payroll tax obligations may not need to pay it at all or may be paying far less than before, because it is going up significantly. We have accepted that. By 1 July next year it will be \$1 million as the threshold. As a former employer who did pay payroll tax in the past I can tell you that is a wonderful move and that is another way that we are supporting small to medium businesses in very, very real terms. I have stood in this place before and actually pointed out the fact that when those opposite last had government for four years they had I think it was a meagre 0.05 per cent reduction in the payroll tax. That was their grand contribution towards assisting businesses who had to be slugged with payroll tax then. Over that time we have increased the threshold. As I say, it will be \$1 million next year. We have also reduced the rate, and if you are in the regions it is reduced even more so. The rate of payroll tax is incredibly low. I do not have the figures to date, and I do not want to get it incorrect for *Hansard*. But I have spoken on this at length before.

Having clarified a few of those things, I would like to speak about the budget in broad terms and also in terms of my district of Monbulk. This is a responsible budget. It is a prudent budget. It is a budget which ensures our economy will continue to grow and thrive, with record employment and growth. This is forecast by Deloitte. This is not us sitting here in the chamber forecasting it, it is Deloitte, and

their reputation is fairly stellar around the world when it comes to economics and forecasts. I am pretty satisfied that they have got a good view on this. It is a budget which responds realistically to the challenges being faced not just in Victoria and not just in Australia but around the world. It is a sensible and it is a disciplined approach. If one only listened to those opposite, one could be forgiven for thinking that our economy here in Victoria exists in its own little universe, in this tiny, tiny bubble, impervious to external pressures and forces like wars, pandemics, global inflationary pressures and increasing interest rates. These things sit well beyond the boundaries of Victoria and well beyond the remit of everyone in this chamber. These are huge external global pressures on us all.

I would like to cover some of the key economic statistics as well. The Victorian economy has created more than 560,000 jobs since September 2020, which is the highest jobs growth in the nation, and about one in three of all jobs created nationwide over this period were in Victoria. We absolutely have been and are punching above our weight. One in seven of all people employed in Victoria have actually only acquired that job since September 2020 – again, a staggering figure. This is the most jobs created by any state in absolute and percentage terms. As a result – and this is something that is a source of pride for all of us in this room – unemployment remains historically low, hovering around the 4 per cent mark, and it is near the lowest it has been in nearly half a century. That is a wonderful thing that as a Labor government we can say. And I can tell you I know what helps the cost of living: it is having a job. It is actually having an income. The fact that we have incredible employment across the state is definitely a hallmark of Labor government here, and it is one that I know collectively we all take great pride in.

The focus of this year's budget is quite clearly on helping families, and it is delivering cost-of-living relief for those who are doing it tough. On some of those in particular, I would like to talk about the area of schools and children. It is an area obviously close to my heart, as a former teacher. The \$400 school saving bonus for every student in state schools and eligible families at non-government schools is going to help so many families to cover the cost of camps and excursions – all those additional costs which really do put pressure on the bottom line. This is a great initiative. I have already spoken with many, many parents who are looking forward to this and state school principals who know that this will have a real impact. It will really help so many families across the board, even at some of my other non-government schools where they have got a number of families in need who are eligible for this. This is going to have a really good impact for them as well.

I am also incredibly proud that we are tripling our free Glasses for Kids program. It makes a massive, massive difference and impact, and it improves the educational outcomes for children. I have heard the member for Yan Yean speak in here a number of times with great passion about how important it is for young children to have any vision issues identified early and corrected – the magic of putting a pair of glasses on and realising that all the stars in the sky actually do not twinkle as wildly as you thought they did. It makes quite a difference when you have glasses. I am really proud that we are doing that.

I am thrilled that we are continuing with our \$200 Get Active Kids vouchers as well for kids from eligible families, because it is important not only for physical health but mental health to engage in sport. For families who are doing it tough, sometimes those discretionary spends are just too much. The fact that we are supporting that is a really good assistance and aid to families who need some cost-of-living relief.

I have spoken about this before, but I will say it again: I cannot tell you how delighted I am that we are expanding the breakfast clubs program across the state. It is an absolute winner. When I called some of my principals who are in schools that do not yet have it and told them that it is going to be rolled out, there was incredible delight. There was real happiness, because they know that this will make a difference for children who need it. You cannot learn on an empty stomach. I mean, we are adults here and I know that there are times when we all get a little bit distracted because we would like to go and have something to eat. Imagine if you are a child who turns up to school – and I have taught children who have come to school on empty stomachs, and I have worked with staff who went and

actually paid for their lunch. This initiative is fantastic. I could not be prouder that we are rolling it out across the country. I think we have mentioned a number of times in here what happened to Free Fruit Friday the last time those opposite were in government – cut and culled. We have taken the total opposite approach, and that is what is happening. It shows our values writ large. We are a government that cares about education. We care about children, and we support families.

I am also thrilled and delighted that we are investing in our teachers and classroom upgrades. \$1.8 billion is allocated in this budget to build, maintain and upgrade schools across the state and deliver on our promise to build 100 new schools by 2026. We have heard the Minister for Education in this place state how many schools were built when those opposite were in, and I believe – I am happy to be corrected if I am incorrect – it was zero. That is a sad number, that circle – zero schools built by those opposite when they had government for four years. We are building 100 by 2026. How extraordinary. I am really proud of that. I am also really delighted that we are continuing our rollout of early education reforms, including universal three-year-old kinder and supporting families with free kinder as well. There is \$129 million allocated in this budget to continue doing that. There are many, many budget initiatives that continue the great work that has occurred already and will continue to take place.

In terms of my district of Monbulk, in the Dandenong Ranges, I note that this budget has got in it \$302 million to support fire- and flood-impacted communities – and some of this already been spent – to help them recover and rebuild for the long term. We have had extraordinary weather events occur in this state, and they do not come without cost. We are making sure we are taking care of our communities, though, where needed. I am really proud of the work we are doing there, because with the impact of climate change as we go into the future we will all be living it. At the moment I know my constituents know only too well the impact of climate change. It is very real for all of us.

I am also incredibly pleased to see that we have extended the Victorian Homebuyer Fund – \$700 million to extend that. It is helping thousands of Victorian homebuyers to purchase their own home. In fact I know my son has discussed using this homebuyer fund, if he can take the time to find a place. He is thinking about it, and he is really encouraged by this fund. So this is a great initiative.

A member interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: \$700 million indeed. There are so many things we are doing. I have spoken before in here about the importance of TAFE as well and support for skills. There is \$550 million to build the workforces we need for the future, and that is in our skills and TAFE sector. That is fantastic. As new technologies arise, as the nature of work changes – AI will be doing a lot of the jobs that we do now – as new needs come along, we need to make sure we are cross-skilling and upskilling people of all ages from all different backgrounds, no matter what you do. To be able to go and participate in free TAFE to undertake a course without cost – what a wonderful, wonderful initiative. I am really proud that this government has done that, because it certainly was not happening 10 years ago; TAFEs were being closed. The closest TAFE to us in Lilydale – I remember the padlocks on that door. I also remember the day when the former member for Monbulk ensured that it was reopened, and there was great joy then and there is still great joy now. It is a thriving place at Box Hill Institute in Lilydale. I could not be happier about it.

As I said earlier, there has been a lot of noise from those opposite. I would like to put to them, though, that I am happy to hear what their record of investment in the state was from 2010 to 2014. I fancy it is a rather short list. My list is so long that 15 minutes is nowhere near enough. I have so much more that I can talk about here, and I will. I will continue to talk about a few more things, because I think it is really important that we actually acknowledge what this budget does contain.

There is also – this is a staggering figure – \$11 billion for our healthcare system to help our hospitals care for patients and to continue to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Today on the other side of the chamber – I am not sure if it was an interjection or a contribution; sometimes it is hard to

differentiate – I did hear it claimed that we cannot stop talking about the pandemic. Actually we need to continue, because this is like being in a postwar phase. The pandemic and the disruption from that pandemic which – yes, ‘pan’ means world – covered the world impacted on all of us, and the impacts are still there. We are still in this recovery phase post one of the biggest disruptors to our lives in this country in a century. We have had war come close to our borders – I have learned a little bit more about that from some local military historians – but we have never experienced anything in the last century that is equivalent to the pandemic. So when we say we still need to recover from it, we are not being trite, we are not making excuses; it is indeed a fact, it is a reality, and for those opposite to decry that shows a lack of knowledge, understanding, depth and maturity, may I say.

I notice that the time now is winding down on the clock. Again I say it gave me pleasure to speak on this motion, the take-note motion on the budget, and I commend the Treasurer and all his staff on the work they have done.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:28): Labor’s 2024 budget is a budget that demonstrates Labor’s promises and commitments are false, misleading and deceptive. On election night in 2022 the then Premier Daniel Andrews said, ‘We will deliver each and every element of our positive plan to benefit each and every Victorian, no matter how you voted.’ Well, hasn’t that proven to be wrong. First the state budget reneged on its promise to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games, then the budget revealed that the long-awaited rail line to Melbourne Airport will be delayed, and yesterday the western intermodal freight terminal was also shelved. Not only those but the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Royal Women’s Hospital were shelved as well.

And what about for my electorate? The tech school – just in the last meeting I was in the minister said it will be delivered in Warrnambool by 2026, but there is nothing in the budget for the Warrnambool tech school promised at the election in 2022. Like all the other promises, it is false, it is misleading and it is deceptive. Unless this is a government that is going to use its contingency plans to promise these things again and deliver them just before the election to fool the people of Warrnambool –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! The time has arrived for the joint sitting to fill the Senate vacancy. I ask the Clerk to ring the bells to call members to the joint sitting. The Assembly will resume after the joint sitting is concluded, and the bells will ring again at that time.

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

Roma BRITNELL: Before the last election in 2022 the net debt for Victoria was at \$99.98 billion. Not too much longer after that now it has blown out to \$188 billion. That is reckless spending by a government that has no cost control measures. This is a government that has made our debt higher than Queensland’s, New South Wales’s and Tasmania’s put together – \$188 billion. This is a government that has \$40 billion worth of cost blowouts from projects that it cannot manage, because they are overruns of projects that should have cost an amount but have blown out, and we have got a collective amount of \$40 billion in cost blowouts.

What does that mean for South-West Coast? When you look at the roads in South-West Coast, the roads are in a disgraceful state. But this government, as I said earlier, with its misleading, false and deceptive language, is trying to say that it is investing more money in the roads. We heard it after the last budget in 2023, and we heard it again in this budget. We heard about \$105 million of new initiatives. It is really hard to work out in the budget when you compare one year to the next, and that is a deliberate ploy by this government. They want to fudge it so that you cannot figure it out and compare apples with apples. But let us just look at that new initiative of \$105 million. It actually costs about \$1 million to patch a kilometre of road. So if we take that \$40 billion I spoke about in cost blowouts and overruns that the government has wasted, that \$40 billion could have been used to fix all the rural roads in regional Victoria. There are 23,000 kilometres of rural roads under the state’s responsibility, so if it costs \$1 million for 1 kilometre, then we could have, from that \$40 billion, 23,000 kilometres of roads fixed, and we would still have \$17 billion left over to fix the health system.

This is a government that is failing in every possible way, and the roads in South-West Coast are one indication of that. They are so bad at managing these roads that they have changed their performance targets. Two years ago the performance target for resurfacing was set at 12 million square metres. Now they only aim to be able to resurface 340,000 square metres. That is 12 million square metres two years ago to 340,000 square metres now. What a poor performance that they have reduced their target to such to a degree. In fact they have invented a new performance target: it is called 'road area major patched'. This reminds me of when we drive along and we see the potholes and all we are seeing is patching. We are not seeing resurfacing and getting the road back to a shape and a way that it should look in a newly formed road. It reminds me of the Depression, when people were not able to go out and buy new socks; they had to get out the darning needle and darn the hole in the socks. That is what we are seeing from this government. They are in such a perilous state of affairs that they are totally ignoring the state of our roads.

This is a government who have been wasting money and who have been spending money in the city without even looking at the country. Despite the fact that we have 25 per cent of the state's population in the regions, we are seeing from this government an infrastructure budget of \$98 billion put forward for the next 12 months. Only 2 per cent of that – \$2 billion – will go to the whole of regional Victoria. So despite the fact we have 25 per cent of the population of Victoria in the regions, the regions will only get 2 per cent of the infrastructure spend. This is a government that is so city-centric. They are wasting money and not taking responsibility for their financial management.

While they have increased the debt and increased the taxes with no plan to reduce that debt, what they are still unable to do is manage to deliver services. We are seeing cuts to services like elective surgeries. The minister actually got up and said publicly, 'I will accept nothing less than a target of 240,000 elective surgeries under my watch.' Embarrassingly, within a few short weeks the budget had a figure of 207,000 elective surgeries. That is a cut, and that leaves people in pain and desperate. There are cuts to dental health. We know that the waiting list for dental health in South-West Coast is over two years, and yet this government sees fit to cut dental health programs and make people wait in pain even longer. We are seeing the disability sector suffer cuts. The family violence programs which this government keep saying they really do want to see a better outcome from in addressing family violence – well, you cannot do that if you cut the programs. Mental health programs in my own electorate – we have seen the mental health beds promised by this government and put forward in budgets or in election promises, but they are not delivering the mental health acute beds to South West Healthcare. They are also not delivering the mental health locals, which are a community service to keep people well and keep them out of acute beds so that they can actually be assisted before they go into crisis. These are very important preventative measures when our community really does need an injection of assistance with mental health programs, not cuts.

They are cutting the youth justice program. Don't we want to invest in our youth? If they are on that trajectory into crime, we need to be wrapping services around them, not cutting them. In the portfolio I hold of child protection we are seeing cuts of \$140 million – in an area where we are seeing children in out-of-home care who are being exploited by sexual predators, who are dying in care and who are entering the criminal system. One out of two children in out-of-home care are entering the criminal system. These are damning figures, and we should not be seeing cuts, we should be seeing support.

Unfortunately, the government do not seem to understand that bad fiscal management, which they seem incapable of managing, results in less. When you go from taxing and receiving income from tax of \$17 billion to \$45 billion, you will actually see people struggle. You will not be incentivising them, you will be harming their ability to contribute more to the state. One of my constituents Jeff Vick said to me the other day that if local councils were behaving like this, they would be put into administration. He suggested that perhaps it is time to put the state into administration, and I think he is probably quite right. I look at the promises – more deceiving. More false promises and more promises that are not being delivered – deceiving, misleading and false words by this government.

The kinders that were promised – the four-year-old kinders that were promised have been put back so far. In Portland that means that the 30 hours of four-year-old kinder that were promised will not be delivered until 2030. The childcare centres were promised in 2022 at the election. For nearly a year I asked the government what the timelines would look like and when Portland would get their childcare centre, and it was announced at the end of 2023 that they will be building it at the Portland South school. Just this week, or eight days ago, I saw on the website that the forecast for this, which was promised to be in 2026, is now pushed out till 2027. But they are also saying that this is just a forecast and subject to change, which makes me concerned about those childcare centres, because mothers and fathers and families in South-West Coast are desperately pinning their hopes on that childcare centre being built at South Portland. I sincerely hope the government is true to their word and not false and misleading like we have seen right throughout this budget.

We then have agriculture. Agriculture is very important to South-West Coast. It brings in a huge amount of income to the state with the exports. We have exports going to over 49 countries just out of South-West Coast. We have manufacturing from agriculture in South-West Coast. It really does punch well above its weight. Yet we do not even have the word ‘agriculture’ in the department’s name anymore. What we have seen is a cut of 30 per cent to funds to the agriculture department. This government put out so much spin that within a week of that announcement of a 30 per cent cut they announced \$20 million to exotic disease management. If we have an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in this country in the next short while – those cuts of 30 per cent resulted in over 100 people being lost from the department last year, and there will be more this year with these cuts – we would not have the manpower to be able to roll out the support needed to make sure we stop and halt the exotic disease. It is very disappointing. We all know in farming that it is not a matter of if, it is a matter of when, and we need to be prepared as a nation. To lose our agricultural capability through something like foot-and-mouth disease because we have not got the manpower and we have not got the preparedness because we have been cutting budgets is nothing short of shocking.

We have seen tourism to South-West Coast cut at a time when we need to actually grow our regions, not harm them. We have lots of events happening in Melbourne, but it is not just Melbourne this government is governing for, it is South-West Coast as well as Melbourne. We have wonderful events that need to be supported, and these cuts do not do what they need to do. They do not help the regions.

What is really quite disturbing, though, when we see cuts to services like those I have already identified – mental health, disability, family violence programs and the like – is that we have heard just in the last few days that this government has a \$75 billion contingency plan. That means that when they want to win some votes and influence some people to vote for them closer to the election, they will pull out some of the money from this and they will fund some things that they want to win some electorates over with. Just yesterday we heard of another \$12 billion from the Treasurer’s advance. That is an increase in that bucket of money of 3200 per cent on more than a decade ago. That is a very sneaky and inappropriate way to govern Victoria. When people are struggling and cuts are occurring, to have something like that so the government can try and win people over when they have cut \$23 million from cancer funding and they have got a contingency bucket of money of \$75 billion, one has to feel a little bit disgusted by that sort of very low-level behaviour.

So we have cuts in South-West Coast that will really harm people, but we also have budget requirements that have not been funded. The Lookout is the only place in the state that does not have a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. The local upper house member for Labor sidled up with the organisation WRAD six months ago and said she supports WRAD. Well, where is her government’s money that will fund the Lookout? There is nothing in this budget, nothing for the people of South-West Coast, who do deserve to be able to be rehabilitated at home surrounded by people they love and who will care for them.

South West Healthcare – in 2020 we had \$384 million promised for the rebuild. The government will not be honest. They will not say how we can possibly build that project to scope without an increase in funding. Costs have gone up by 30 per cent in construction, yet our budget has not been increased

by the government. It should have been in this budget, and it needs to be. Out of that contingency fund we need to see another significant amount – \$50 million or more – so that that build can be built to scope. The minister cannot keep misleading our community in Warrnambool and saying it will be built to scope but not giving extra funds. Extra funds have been given to all the other builds across regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. It is simply misleading, deceptive and false that the government continue to maintain that that hospital will be built to scope.

Whether it is roads, whether it is hospital funding or whether it is talk of mergers, this government need to stop being false, misleading and deceptive and come clean with Victorians and start governing for the whole of the state of Victoria from border to border, not as the city-centric government that they are proving to continue to be.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (18:51): I rise to speak on the take-note motion on the 2024–25 budget, and it is so good to be standing up here to talk about this Labor budget, which of course builds on the previous Labor budgets, which really have been all about doing things to make people's lives better. I want to just do a little bit of a shout-out to ALP branch members from the Pascoe Vale branch that are here today visiting the member for Pascoe Vale, because I think when you look at budgets and the things that we do in here, it is really because of the support of branch members. Whether it is through the motions of branches keeping us honest, whether it is policy committee work, whether it is volunteering work or whether it is giving us the feedback that we need, from that we can get budgets like we have got at the moment.

Sometimes we do not think about this enough, but one of the most important things to make a person's life better is to have a job, a good-paying job. This budget continues on from previous budgets in providing a pipeline of work through government projects with very strong local content requirements so that we can encourage and support local businesses, and of course those local businesses support local people. I know in the Thomastown electorate, for example, there are so many tradies that are working on things like the Keon Park level crossing removal. There is the duplication of Epping Road from Memorial Avenue right up to Craigieburn Road East. These are the things that of course give us great infrastructure and provide great benefits to local residents in how they get around the area, but they also provide the jobs that everybody needs.

There have been also of course Labor budgets that continually supported research and development. I know another resident of Thomastown, and I will just give a shout-out to Santosh, who is working really hard in getting around to look at medtech to develop apps that are going to make hospital treatment much easier and to be able to do it in your own home.

That gets me on to the Northern Hospital. There has been a huge investment in the Northern Hospital, and that continues in this budget. For example, in this budget we are working on, after building an eight-storey tower, building the next stage, which will have further beds as well as a 40 per cent increase in the emergency department. There is going to be a whole revamping of the area, so the hospital will really look like the great tertiary hospital that it has grown to be. We have the women's health clinic that has now been established and the free IVF. These are all things that have come from this budget and previous Labor budgets to support local people in the area. There are grand plans for Northern Health to continue to expand and provide support even in some of the further northern areas. For example, there is an arrangement with Kilmore hospital. That hospital was unable to get staff and was having trouble providing services for local people, and the Northern Hospital is now in a partnership with the Kilmore hospital, providing staff that go there on a rotational basis to provide specialist services as well as GP services, which again those people within the Kilmore area need. Of course that means they are not having to travel to the emergency department of the Northern Hospital and they can be treated closer to home. That also frees up further areas for those living closer to the Northern Hospital that are required to go there.

We are continuing to build schools. Thomastown has the older, more established areas as well as the new outer suburbs, so it is a balance between ensuring that we redevelop and rebuild the older schools

while also providing for new residents the new schools that are needed for the population explosion in that northern area. In this budget we announced the building of the new school in Wollert, which is called at this time Wollert Andrews Road primary school. This is the fourth school to be built in the Wollert area. Of course we have just recently announced that a children's early learning centre will be built there as well, and it will be built on the same site as the Wollert Andrews Road primary school. Hopefully they will be able to be built at similar times with a design that fits and integrates both of the learning centres. We have got Wollert Secondary College. Again because of growth, the school is pretty well full for the buildings that it has at the moment. The next stage of that secondary school has been announced and will start building this year. That will allow further secondary school students to go to school close to their home in a school that really is first class in its teachers, its principal and its staff as well as the actual buildings and the environment in which the students are learning.

There are also of course some of those smaller cost things that make a big difference to people's lives. For example, we are continuing to invest in cycle paths so that residents can travel both for work in safe areas, so on bicycle paths rather than some of the pretty busy roads, and for recreational purposes to encourage people to get out and have nice places to ride their bike along the Darebin Creek – but also going into the Epping station if they want to use their bike to commute to work and get onto public transport and hopefully then reduce the demand on car parks. These are all the sorts of things that the budget is providing for residents of the Thomastown electorate.

We can also look at things such as of course the great support for the SEC and for the Allan Labor government bringing back some control over electricity generation by continuing to provide and invest in clean energy and also innovation. Through this of course there are jobs as well; it is good for the environment, for our kids and for future generations, but it is also good for supporting businesses with incentives in order for them to become cleaner and greener. I have to say in the last couple of weeks I have been with my friend and neighbour Minister D'Ambrosio and also my friend Minister Hutchins visiting local businesses where support and incentives have been provided to them in order for them to continue to do the great work they are doing, whether it is in the clean energy space or in providing new industries that can take up some of the slack from when we lost the whole car industry because of the Liberal federal government and their appalling decisions without any care for the massive job losses that were created and all the skills that were lost when the vehicle industry was closed down.

It is really difficult that I have not had my whole 15 minutes to speak, because there are so many more things that I would like to talk about. There is the West Lalor Tennis Club, a really thriving club. We are now providing –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member for Thomastown will have the call when the motion returns to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Private security

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:00): (681) Tonight I raise an item for the Minister for Police. I am asking the minister to have Victoria Police train private security officers in, and allow them to use, tasers, particularly those who are based in large shopping centres. In my electorate we have what is one of the largest shopping centres in the Southern Hemisphere, Westfield Doncaster. I think all Australians are horrified at what they have seen occurring certainly in Sydney and at other knife attacks which have been prominent over time. We want to make sure that Australians – all of us – are as safe as we can be in all aspects of life, but certainly when Australians are shopping and in large shopping centres.

I am hoping that we would be able to, through the Minister for Police, train private security, registered and overseen by Victoria Police, in the use of tasers, which are nonlethal. All security guards in those shopping centres are trained in first aid, so post the use of the device they can be there to manage the person that has been, possibly, tasered. What I am seeking is for the minister to examine this as a way forward for private security so they can be better equipped to manage some of the threats that we are facing in our society in, sadly, places like my electorate, with Westfield Doncaster, one of the largest shopping centres in Australia. This would provide those private security guards – where properly licensed, where properly looked at and where properly regulated by the police and allowed by government – the ability to eliminate a threat that may be existent and in that way to protect the lives and the safety and security of innocent shoppers, given that we are as a society, sadly, facing a growing incidence of knife crime.

Pascoe Vale electorate education funding

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:02): (682) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the investments the Victorian Labor government have been making to deliver the Education State across my electorate, including for Pascoe Vale North Primary School. As the local member for Pascoe Vale, as a local dad and as a proud product of our local public education system, I am committed to doing everything I can to help continually improve local schools for local families, including Pascoe Vale North Primary. First established in 1956, the Pascoe Vale North Primary School is situated on the corner of Derby Street and Kent Road. For almost 70 years it has continued to educate generations of local young students for their careers and lives ahead, thanks to generations of teachers, including Matt and Chris Coughlan, who are in the gallery today, who met there and taught there from 1982 to 1985. Today a vibrant home for 420 students, 40 staff and hundreds of families from a range of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds – consistent with its motto, ‘Rise to excellence’ – the school very much prides itself on having a supportive culture where everybody is valued and encouraged to reach their full potential.

That is why I was proud to have again visited the school on 22 May to meet with school principal Deborah Crane and school council president Peter Van Buuren to commend the work of the school’s leaders, teachers, admin support staff, volunteers and students and to receive an update on the school’s good work and its ongoing priorities, including the need for a covered outdoor learning area and other areas for future improvements. This ongoing advocacy will of course continue to build on the previous investments we have made at Pascoe North Primary through federal and state Labor governments, which have included projects delivered through the Building the Education Revolution program to upgrade the then administration and learning blocks, which I am proud to have helped facilitate back then as a humble electorate officer to the former federal member for Wills Kelvin Thomson, who is also a former student of the school. Since 2014 we have also continued to invest to improve school grounds, facilities and resources through the Inclusive Schools Fund and established a new sensory garden to promote mindfulness and support through the mental health and wellbeing schools initiative. There are also the Glasses for Kids program and of course the new \$400 school kids bonus and much more.

These commitments will continue to provide the students of Pascoe Vale North with good-quality education, including this year’s school captains and junior school leaders, Aryan, Samirah, Lachlan and Rayane. But it is also students like Angus Kendall in grade 5 who will continue to benefit from our commitment to improving local schools. I had the pleasure to welcome Angus and his dad Adam to Parliament, following the receipt of his passionate letter, to talk to him about issues around transport, environment and youth policy. He also met the Minister for Education himself.

But it is beyond the school gates at Pascoe Vale North Primary that we are investing to improve learning opportunities for local families too. Just down the road we are investing a record \$1.4 million to rebuild and expand the Derby Street Children’s Centre to cater for 75 children and support the rollout of free kinder, saving families \$2500 a year. We are developing the first ever Merri-bek North

education plan for secondary schools to continue improving the quality of local secondary education, with the member for Broadmeadows, including through investments in John Fawcner secondary college – \$14.5 million – and upgrades to Pascoe Vale Girls, Coburg High and Glenroy secondary. I really welcome the minister's response so I can share it with my hardworking, dedicated Pascoe Vale North school community, who are there to support young people.

Wild dog control

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (19:05): (683) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I am seeking is for the minister to announce the continuation of the wild dog program in Victoria unchanged. In the north-west of the state we have had some changes, where trapping can only now occur on private land – controls can only occur on private land. To implement that in the east of the state would be an unmitigated disaster. The only way you can control these wild dogs is in the 3-kilometre interface to private land, where trappers undertake their control actions, whether that be trapping or shooting, on the tracks they know the dogs use. To try and then control dogs on private land is impossible. It is just a complete waste of time. The reasons for that are you cannot trap a wild dog in an open paddock and it is too late once the wild dogs are into private freehold. We know at this time of the year, when we get the first snowfalls and the cold weather, the wild dogs come down into the lower country and they start impacting on sheep and really impacting on the viability of those farmers, so we need some certainty.

There are too many question marks around this program. We need some certainty that this program will continue unchanged, that we do not get rid of the 3-kilometre buffer zone and that our doggers can still continue to get out there. They get about 500 problem dogs a year, which equates to thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars in savings. If we get rid of that program or change that program, it will force farmers off the land, so I call on the minister to come out in the very short term and make sure that that program is funded and that there are no changes made to the detriment of our rural landholders.

Village 21

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (19:07): (684) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, Minister Shing in the other place, and I would like the minister to visit my electorate of Frankston and the Village 21 project Moorrumbina Mongurnallin. This \$1.7 million project comprises five units that will accommodate six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths, who will live with two mentors. The village will incorporate both indoor and outdoor communal spaces, including kitchen, laundry and dining areas as well as a gathering space, barbecue area, yarning circle and basketball court. Approximately 40 volunteers whose organisations have been involved in some way attended the site today to plant over 1000 native seedlings. This supported housing model is specifically designed to support young people 18 to 21 years of age who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness with the aim to transition them to independence, enhance life skills and develop supportive networks while maintaining or establishing vocational endeavours. Village 21 is a partnership with Kids Under Cover and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. I look forward to seeing this project completed and welcoming the minister to Frankston.

Tourism funding

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (19:08): (685) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and the action I seek is for him to either publicly or privately – he can make the choice – lobby the Treasurer to reverse the funding cuts for the tourism sector in the last budget. On the Mornington Peninsula the tourism sector is a huge part of what we do. So many businesses and visitors come there for that reason. We know in Rosebud more than two-thirds and in Sorrento three-quarters of the businesses relate to that sector, whether it is accommodation, cafes or retail. We also know from the latest survey from the Mornington Peninsula shire on the tourism sector more than 43 per cent of the businesses surveyed said they have had a decrease in the expenditure within their businesses.

The Mornington Peninsula, like many other regions, rely so much on the destination marketing funding from both Visit Victoria and their regional tourism boards to make sure that their regions are promoted both interstate and internationally. The budget cuts saw almost 61 per cent – more than \$280 million – ripped out of that part of the budget during the Treasurer's delivery only a couple of weeks ago. It is going to be detrimental to that whole sector.

This government has not met any of its targets in the tourism space over the last couple of years. Expenditure from international travellers is down. International visitors are down. We know that more than 20 per cent of those international visitors are not coming back to this state, and we are recovering slower than every other state or territory in this country in the tourism sector other than the Northern Territory. We know that international tourism spending in Victoria is only at 73 per cent of its prepandemic level compared to that of New South Wales at 96 per cent and Queensland at 94 per cent. We also saw in the recent Western Australian budget more than \$73 million put into destination marketing for that state as well as an increase in their major events fund. And Queensland in a couple of weeks time is going to start the biggest tourism campaign it has ever launched to try to attract those international visitors to Queensland.

All of these things are making Victoria a less desirable or less marketed destination compared to the rest of Australia. We need the government to pull its finger out, invest in the tourism sector properly, invest in those small businesses, those small operators who are prepared to put their balls on the line and have a real go, and back them in.

Victorian African Communities Committee

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (19:11): (686) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is that the minister joins me so that together we can brief the Victorian African Communities Committee (VACC) on ways that the Allan Labor government is supporting African Australian communities. As the minister at the table, the Minister for Development Victoria, knows very well, I get a great deal of joy out of the chairing role I have on the Victorian African Communities Committee. I am fortunate to spend time with my fellow members Selba-Gondoza Luka, Dr Stephane Shepherd, Adongwot Manyoul, Anaab Rooble, Catherine Jonathan, Tawana Basutu, Fred Alale, Mohamed Semra, Mahamed Ahmed, Dr Tebeje Molla and Andrew Gai, and it is co-chaired brilliantly by Tigist Kebede and Monica Forson.

I was delighted last week to join a sparkling group of young people at Thornbury High, the superstar local member for Northcote and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ms Stitt from the other place. It was a moment of sheer joy that I think the minister at the table should also take great pleasure from hearing about when the minister was able to let the children, the tutors and the teachers know that this government is investing \$17 million into the homework club and other initiatives as part of the *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*. This extraordinary homework club is run by Endeavour Youth Australia, led by the amazingly impressive – I am running out of superlatives – Mohamed Semra. We are fortunate to have Mohamed. I am also rapt that Mohamed is about to do some work in Cranny. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Mahamed Ahmed for his deep policy work and years of toil, which have led the Allan Labor government to back our African Australian young people, especially in education settings.

Last sitting week the VACC visited Parliament. It was a sparkling event of fascinating conversation, and several members of cabinet came. I look forward to the minister's response.

Shepparton electorate housing

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:13): (687) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing in the other place, and the action I seek is that the minister comes to Shepparton and meets with the local housing agencies to hear firsthand about the housing crisis in my electorate of Shepparton district. My office has been inundated with people trying to get housing. I was recently contacted by distressed constituents from my electorate, a 52-year-old woman and her 58-year-old

husband, who at present are living in their car. The woman is the carer for her husband, who suffers from heart disease, unstable angina, chronic asthma, diabetes, depression and allergies. She does not want to be named as she feels embarrassed by the situation. However, she is happy for me to pass on their details to the minister. The woman suffers from sleep apnoea and uses a CPAP machine each night. She also suffers from anxiety and depression, which have escalated due to their circumstances. She said it is becoming extremely difficult to recharge her CPAP machine and she has had nights when she has not used the machine. They were living in a shed but had to evacuate as it leaked and had mould and was infested with rats and mice. Her husband was also experiencing allergic reactions.

The woman was told in February this year by Beyond Housing that they had been referred to Wintringham Housing, were on the priority waitlist and should hear something by May this year. This past week she checked on the progress of their case and was told that Wintringham were no longer accepting referrals. She said they have applied for every house that has become available on the private rental market up to \$400, as being on pensions that is the maximum amount that they are able to afford, and even that amount would leave them significantly short. She said they could not compete with the huge number of applicants and due to their circumstances felt they would be significantly disadvantaged in getting a rental property. She said, 'We keep trying so hard to find something. It is just impossible.'

The housing crisis is a vicious cycle, and this couple are, like so many others, living with housing distress. My electorate has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the state, and Beyond Housing are overwhelmed and also very distressed that they cannot meet anywhere near the demand that they are faced with. They have also publicly raised their concerns, highlighting the local housing crisis. No-one should have to live like this, let alone with significant health issues like this couple have. I look forward to the minister's response.

Bushfire preparedness

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (19:15): (688) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment. Victoria is home to an area of native forest protected from logging which is larger than the entire landmass of Tasmania, including the Dandenong Ranges National Park. Recently my constituents have expressed concerns about the management of forest debris following numerous storm events over the past three years. My community is aware that work has been going on to reduce the potential devastation of bushfires in order to protect our rare flora and fauna, all of which are highly susceptible to large-scale bushfires. Can the minister please provide an update to my community on the bushfire risk mitigation strategies currently being implemented in the Dandenong Ranges National Park and surrounding native forests, including how teams on the ground are working to minimise environmental impacts and promote our ecological values?

Polwarth electorate health services

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:16): (689) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek from the Minister for Health is that she gives a guarantee to the hospitals in Polwarth that they will not be amalgamated or closed in coming weeks or months or by the end of the year – hospitals in Colac; Great Ocean Road Health, which of course is Lorne and Apollo Bay; Hesse Rural Health at Winchelsea, which provides an enormous range of services from Beecac to Rokewood and around the district and across even into Bannockburn; and Timboon health, which is a fantastic multipurpose service that picks up and helps support a vibrant rural community but also a growing tourist community down at Port Campbell. These are important regional health services. They have been well governed for a long time, and they provide exceptional bespoke services to their communities.

All these services are very well supported by their local communities. These communities have fundraised and worked hard for a long time. For example, Colac Area Health has a remote cancer service that was bought and paid for by the local community – not a dollar of government funds went to provide that service. Right around Polwarth there are extra rooms, aged care services and other

things that have been provided by the community. The community only has buy-in to the services when they know they have some control over them and they can deliver the services that their communities need.

The concern has been heightened in recent talk and uncounted media speculation that the minister has refused to come out and knock on the head. We have had board members and hospital administrators spoken to by department heads, warning them that they cannot employ any more people, that they are not confirming appointments of medical staff, and hospital administrators and others are being left in limbo. This is all creating a great deal of uncertainty, so much so that the Timboon community has called a community meeting for next Wednesday, and I absolutely expect other health services in Colac, Winchelsea and along the Great Ocean Road will find themselves in a similar situation of being forced to have community meetings and call on this government to make it clear that the viability, sustainability and care of these important, much-loved health services will continue into the future, because without them country people fear that they will have to travel longer, spend more time on the road and more time away from their families and loved ones and will not have the services that their community needs because they just will not fit into the huge behemoth that is Barwon Health, based in Geelong and not focused on the boutique needs of country communities.

Kororoit electorate multicultural business support

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (19:19): (690) The adjournment I wish to raise is for the Minister for Small Business. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with small business owners in the Kororoit electorate and share information on the multicultural business chambers and traders groups grant program. Whether you are looking to start your own business or expand your operations, running a small business can be a challenge. In Victoria we have seen a 13 per cent surge in business investment during the past calendar year, outpacing growth in the rest of the country by nearly 6 per cent. This shows that businesses are backing the Allan Labor government's plan for Victoria. Victoria is proudly home to more than 701,000 small businesses, and 34 per cent of Australian small business owners are migrants, with even more small business owners having one or more parents born overseas. With 65 per cent of new migrant families calling Kororoit home, multicultural businesses play an important role in Victoria. They broaden our global connections, create local employment opportunities and strengthen cultural diversity in Victoria. This is evident as you travel through Kororoit, which is such a melting pot of cuisine and culture. I understand that the multicultural business chambers and trader groups grants program can support further opportunities to help multicultural businesses build knowledge and skills and boost our local economies. We know that small businesses are the heart of our economy, and I would welcome the Minister for Small Business to share further information with my local small business owners.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:20): The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Minister for Police. He asked that Victoria Police train and authorise or allow private security guards in shopping centres to use tasers. That matter will be passed on. The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs asking that she join her and brief the Victorian African Communities Committee on the implementation of the Victorian African communities plan, which is a great piece of work, and the member does a great job chairing that wonderful committee. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Minister for Environment asking that the minister announce the continuation of the wild dog program unchanged.

The member for Frankston raised a matter for the Minister for Housing asking the minister in the other place to visit the Village 21 project in his electorate, which is another great project incorporating support from Kids Under Cover and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency – a great program. The member for Nepean raised a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. He asked that the minister lobby the Treasurer to reverse the funding cuts, as he called them, in the tourism

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budget. The member for Monbulk raised a matter for the Minister for Environment asking for an update on bushfire mitigation strategies in the Dandenong Ranges – an important matter I know for the member for Monbulk.

The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Housing asking her to visit Shepparton and meet with housing agencies, such as Beyond Housing, who do great work in that part of the world, and I am sure the minister will take that matter under consideration. The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Education asking for an update on investments in education, including the Pascoe Vale North Primary School upgrade. The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the Minister for Health asking the minister to give a guarantee that hospitals will not be closed in his area. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business asking her to meet with small businesses in her electorate and to talk about the multicultural business grants that are available, and I am sure that the minister will be keen to visit the member.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:22 pm.

*Joint sitting of Parliament***Senate vacancy****Members of both houses met in Assembly chamber at 6:32 pm.**

The CHAIR (Shaun Leane): Welcome to the joint sitting of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly to choose a person to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the unfortunate, sad death of Senator Linda White. I now invite proposals from members for the appointment of a person to hold the vacant place in the Senate.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier): I propose:

That Lisa Darmanin hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the death of Senator Linda White.

She is willing to accept the nomination. In order to satisfy the joint sitting as to the requirements of section 15 of the Commonwealth constitution, I also advise that the President has advice from the state secretary of the Australian Labor Party Victorian branch that Lisa Darmanin is the selection of the Australian Labor Party, the party previously represented in the Senate by Senator Linda White.

The CHAIR: Is there someone who seconds the proposal?

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition): I second the proposal.

The CHAIR: Are there any further proposals? As only one person has been proposed, I declare that Lisa Darmanin has been chosen to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the unfortunate, sad death of Senator Linda White.

I now declare the joint sitting closed.

Proceedings terminated 6:34 pm.