



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 20 March 2024

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew ¹	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaele	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira ²	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha ⁵	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina ³	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Limbrick, David ⁴	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard ⁶	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² Lib until 27 March 2023

³ Appointed 14 November 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 November 2024

⁶ Appointed 7 February 2024

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

CONTENTS

PETITIONS	
Taxation.....	939
BILLS	
Hemp Industry Bill 2024	939
Introduction and first reading	939
COMMITTEES	
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	939
Report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes	939
PAPERS	
Papers.....	940
PETITIONS	
Waste and recycling management	940
Response.....	940
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices	940
MOTIONS	
Middle East conflict	941
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Anglesea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna	941
Middle East conflict	941
Ramadan.....	942
Energy costs	942
Cannabis law reform	942
Portland South Primary School	942
Stalking Awareness Day Australia	943
Linda White.....	943
Rye Yacht Club	943
Rye Bowls Club.....	943
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Duck hunting.....	944
MOTIONS	
Wildlife rescue	948
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Maternal and child health services	965
Gender identity	966
Ministers statements: Country Fire Authority	967
Homelessness.....	967
Water policy	969
Ministers statements: Whittlesea mental health and wellbeing local	970
TAFE funding.....	970
Bail reform	972
Ministers statements: Mirboo North storm recovery	973
Tasty Plate.....	974
Clyde North fire services	975
Ministers statements: housing	976
Written responses	976
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	976
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	976
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	977
Southern Metropolitan Region	977
Eastern Victoria Region.....	977
Southern Metropolitan Region	977
Northern Metropolitan Region	978
Eastern Victoria Region	978
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	978
Western Victoria Region	978
Northern Metropolitan Region	978
Northern Victoria Region	979
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	979
Western Metropolitan Region	979

CONTENTS

Northern Victoria Region	979
COMMITTEES	
Legal and Social Issues Committee	980
Reference	980
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Orders of the day	998
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Production of documents	998
STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS	
Department of Treasury and Finance	1016
Budget papers 2022–23	1016
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action	1017
Victorian Renewable Energy Target 2022–23 Progress Report	1017
Victorian Auditor-General’s Office	1017
Withdrawal from 2026 Commonwealth Games	1017
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	1018
Report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes	1018
Victorian Auditor-General’s Office	1019
Withdrawal from 2026 Commonwealth Games	1019
ADJOURNMENT	
Community sport funding	1021
Education system	1021
Supermarket prices	1021
Maternal and child health services	1022
Assisted reproductive treatment services	1022
Wallan road infrastructure	1023
Maternal and child health services	1024
Rental support	1024
Land tax	1025
Albury–Wodonga hospital	1025
Gender identity	1026
Responses	1027

Wednesday 20 March 2024

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Petitions

Taxation

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 125 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the new taxes imposed in the State Budget will have a detrimental effect on the business community and families already struggling with the cost of inflation.

Debt levels in Victoria are unsustainable and will cause enormous damage for future generations to pay. The new taxes will ensure that companies will look to other states with lower taxes to run their businesses.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council reject the new taxes added in the State Budget.

David LIMBRICK: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Hemp Industry Bill 2024

Introduction and first reading

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:34): I introduce a bill for an act to re-enact, with amendments, the law relating to the cultivation and processing of industrial hemp for certain authorised purposes, to make consequential amendments to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Rachel PAYNE: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

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

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:35): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Michael GALEA: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

I will make some brief remarks on the tabling of this report. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) has a variety of very important functions, among the chief of which is to conduct the annual financial and performance outcomes hearings, which we did late last year, and we have spent the last few months busily deliberating on this report. The report overviews government spending over two financial years; in this case we have done two financial years in light of the fact that the previous November was the time of the state election. This is quite a comprehensive report. It is one that I recommend members read to get a good overview of where we are at with various parts of government spending. In particular there are very useful diagrams and tables throughout the report which, amongst other things, show the machinery-of-government changes in a very simple and clear format. I think it will be a very useful resource for members.

I would like to particularly thank the secretariat staff, who have worked so hard in putting this report together: our executive officer Dr Caroline Williams as well as Dr Krystle Gatt Rapa, Charlotte Lever, Dr Kathleen Hurley, Mathias Richter, Rowen Germain and Jacqueline Coleman. I would also like to acknowledge the chair of the committee, the member for Laverton Sarah Connolly, who has worked really hard on this report, as indeed have all members from across this chamber and the other chamber, including my colleagues in this place Mr McGowan and Mrs McArthur. I also note the contribution of the member for Melbourne, who has sadly left PAEC. But in very good news we are welcoming Mr Puglielli from this place, so we are increasing the representation from this chamber on PAEC from three to four.

I commend this report to the house. It is, as I say, a good read, and I encourage members to engage with it.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Withdrawal from 2026 Commonwealth Games, March 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Council – Ordinary Returns, 1 July 2023 to 31 January 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

Ombudsman – Social housing complaint handling – progress report, March 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Petitions

Waste and recycling management

Response

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: minister's response to petition titled 'Reject proposal to construct a waste-to-energy plant in Lara, Geelong' presented by Dr Mansfield.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

*Motions***Middle East conflict**

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the state of Israel is being prosecuted in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its potential genocide of the Palestinian people and its occupation of Palestinian territories;
- (2) recognises that the ICJ has ordered Israel to take measures to prevent genocide of the Palestinian people and allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians;
- (3) supports these rulings made by the ICJ; and
- (4) notes that despite these rulings, Israel has continued to block aid and indiscriminately bomb the people of Gaza and in doing so the state of Israel is blatantly disregarding the ICJ's orders and international law.

Leave refused.

*Members statements***Anglesea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna**

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (09:48): I rise today to acknowledge the important work of Anglesea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna, known as Angair. This organisation is dedicated to protecting the natural beauty of the environment now and for future generations. For more than 50 years the knowledge, commitment and passion of Angair volunteers has ensured the environment of the district not only is protected but is there for people to enjoy, learn from and be inspired by. Their annual flower show and art show and year-round workshops are loved and appreciated by not only locals but visitors as well. At the recent Angair AGM two outstanding volunteers were awarded honorary life memberships. Christine and Peter Forster have made an extraordinary contribution. It was noted that Christine as a committee of management member provided wise counsel for many years and was instrumental in its policy development and strategic planning, and her knowledge of environmental history and understanding of complex water policy issues were vital for the committee's informed discussions. Peter was recognised for his tireless and energetic commitment, having served in so many roles, including president, treasurer, minute taker, regular weeder and all-round practical problem solver. Christine and Peter have mentored so many people, and their work has been incredibly significant. I would like to acknowledge the work of outgoing president Sally White and congratulate newly minted president Wendy Crebbin. I am so proud of the work of Angair, and of course I encourage all members to discover more – (*Time expired*)

Middle East conflict

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:49): For months we have seen thousands of people turning out in support of peace at rallies in Melbourne. However, communities in our regions have also been uniting in solidarity, demanding a lasting and just peace in Gaza. This conflict is touching lives in these communities in so many ways as well. Groups like Free Palestine Ballarat, Free Palestine Geelong and Friends of Palestine – Torquay have been moved to action in my electorate of Western Victoria. Free Palestine Ballarat's sensitive yet powerful advocacy was recognised by Ballarat City Council in their passage of a motion calling for a ceasefire, supported by a clear majority of councillors. Free Palestine Geelong has repeatedly brought the community there together in peaceful protests, including rallies and a beautiful kite-flying event at the Geelong waterfront. Friends of Palestine – Torquay held a vigil to provide space for people in the Surf Coast region to express their grief at the loss of life throughout this conflict.

All of these groups have brought together people from across political lines – unions, faith groups, health workers and many others experiencing profound distress and grief at the unfolding genocide that is occurring. Their work reflects that our regional centres are diverse, multicultural, multifait

communities that not only support each other through challenging times but are willing to speak up and take action when injustice is occurring.

Ramadan

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:51): Today I would like to extend my heartfelt best wishes to the diverse and growing Muslim community of the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region for a blessed and peaceful Ramadan. In the past week many in our region have commenced their observance of a month of fasting. With daylight saving still in effect, the fast stretches from around 10 to 6 in the morning to past 7:30 at night, marking a deep period of reflection and commitment. In the face of the challenges that come with global unrest and personal tribulations, the spirit of Ramadan gains even greater significance. Ramadan is an opportunity for our Muslim community to pause, reflect, extend empathy and offer support to those facing difficulties. It is also an opportunity for those outside of the faith to extend the same empathy. The pillars of Ramadan – fasting, prayer and acts of charity – are not just practices of personal endurance but actions that bring the community closer together. Here is to a fulfilling and peaceful Ramadan for those observing in my region and across Victoria. Ramadan Kareem.

Energy costs

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): On another matter, I would like to also acknowledge this morning that whilst many constituents in my region continue to face cost-of-living pressures I particularly welcome the news of the draft Victorian default offer, which is going to see a significant decrease in electricity prices for residents and for small businesses in my region.

Cannabis law reform

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:52): It is always a treat to have new research from the Penington Institute arrive in my inbox, and the subject line, pithily titled ‘Cannabis reform: it’s time for change’, certainly piqued my interest. Penington’s new research looks at community views on cannabis regulation. To no-one’s surprise, the findings reveal that community attitudes towards the regulation of cannabis are extremely favourable: 54 per cent of Victorians are rallying behind the introduction of a regulated cannabis market for adult use, nearly twice the number of people who currently support our failed criminalisation approach. Coming hot on the heels of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare household drug survey, the Penington research confirms that the tide is turning. Victorians know that our current drug laws are not only failing but actually causing harm. People want to see regulation of cannabis in order to stem the flow of profits to organised crime, protect consumers from dangerous products, prioritise community safety and wellbeing and stop the practice of arresting 9000 Victorians every year. It is time for our lawmakers to get on with the job of reforming our cannabis laws, which are not fit for purpose and are clearly out of step with what most Victorians want.

Portland South Primary School

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (09:54): I was delighted to visit the Portland South Primary School a few weeks ago. They are about to embark on a project as part of the Victorian government’s Best Start, Best Life reforms that are going on; they will receive an early learning centre, to be constructed on the site of their school. I was met by the school leaders when I arrived – four smiling faces – who then conducted a very informative tour of the school. I then met with members of the school council, who quizzed me about the forthcoming early learning centre, and I also attended the assembly, which was run by the students. It was a great delight to be invited to say a few words to the students – the whole school – as well as the significant number of parents who attended the assembly. It was very positive to see acting principal Joanne van de Camp leading such a gentle and positive school culture. I was honoured to meet that community, and I look forward to the next two years of planning and construction of the early learning centre.

Stalking Awareness Day Australia

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:55): On Thursday of the last sitting week I was privileged to be here at Parliament with Di McDonald to announce Stalking Awareness Day for 24 May. For those of you who do not know, Di McDonald is an amazing and courageous woman. She has become Australia's leading advocate for stalking victims after she was featured on ABC television's *Australian Story*, and she continues to do this work even though her stalker is now out of prison. Di came to my office last year to ask for assistance with her vision for an awareness day, which is something we were more than happy to help her with. Thousands of Victorians each year are impacted by stalking, and unfortunately some of these offences escalate to the most serious of crimes. Stalking Awareness Day Australia aims to empower stalking victims, advocate for sensible legal reform and provide a resource to help with better policing. I urge the government to listen to victims of stalking like Di, who is providing a great resource for those who want to understand the needs of stalking victims. You can find out more on their website www.sada.au.

Linda White

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:56): My members statement is on the recent passing of Linda White. Linda was a staunch trade unionist and someone who lived her Labor values every day. She rose to be national assistant secretary after a lifetime contribution of activism in her union, the Australian Services Union, representing many workers, notably in her defence of and advocacy for workers in the Ansett dispute. Linda also contributed significantly to changes to rules of the Australian Services Union. Ahead of her time, she contributed to the implementation of affirmative action rule changes, along with many others, that saw rule changes ensure that women would hold 50 per cent of conference delegate positions within that union. I was also part of seeing this change, and I recall fondly participating in debates on the floor of my own branch conference, where the debate, I can happily report, was won. Linda was a formidable advocate for working people. She was a sister and a comrade to many. She made an enormous contribution to so many in the movement and for working people, and I am privileged to have worked with her, to have benefited from her strong leadership and to have been part of a period within the movement that saw so much positive change. Her life was cut short way too soon, with so much more to give and to offer. She will be missed by many, and my deepest sympathies and sincerest condolences go to Linda's family, friends and colleagues. Vale, Linda.

Rye Yacht Club

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:58): I rise to speak about a couple of visits I had in Rye on Sunday. It was glorious weather, and I started the day at the Rye Yacht Club. It is sensational, the amount of water sports going on there – far more than just sailing, whether it is kayaks, whether it is windsurfers. The amount they are doing for the community – over 350 members, getting the grade 6s in term 1 every year trained up in sailing – is just sensational. Lachie Featherston and everyone at the school get them along. It is just so good to see a club that is bringing people together, getting them active and getting them out on the water. I really thank the club for taking the time to get me through and around to see everything that is going on, whether it is the new umbrellas and barrels up on the deck looking out over the water, whether it is the observationists making sure people are safe in the water or whether it is all the equipment that volunteers are maintaining and the investment that you are all making around the club to keep it a fantastic facility.

Rye Bowls Club

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:59): After that, being St Paddy's Day, we were off to the Rye Bowls Club. We had a fantastic day on the green. Everyone dashed a bit of green on the green for the day. We had a barbecue. The hamburgers dished up by everyone in the kitchen were sensational. It was a good chance to have a chat about local issues, what people are passionate about, while also getting out and having a bit of a social role, talking to the club. There was a big turnout. Thanks to David and everyone there who had me along. It was great to spend the day together.

Production of documents

Duck hunting

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:59): I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution all documents relating to Victoria's native bird hunting arrangements pertaining to:

- (1) the decision-making for the government response to the Legislative Council's select committee inquiry into Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements; and
- (2) the 2024 season arrangements, including all communication between the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the Game Management Authority with the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, the Minister for Environment and the Premier.

In moving this motion to obtain the documents related to the government's decision to continue duck shooting I hope to understand what possessed the government to so blatantly disregard science and evidence. I also want to learn why the government felt emboldened to increase the length of this year's season by a month and increase the bag count only to then decrease it back to previous levels in 2025, because right now it seems like a slap in the face to everyone who spent the past year working tirelessly on this inquiry all for nothing – not to mention the decades that campaigners have spent on this issue.

The inquiry unequivocally proved that duck shooting cannot be done safely, responsibly or sustainably and that no amount of reform and regulation can change this. A ban was the inquiry's top recommendation. It declared that wounding rates cannot be avoided, with a minimum of 6 per cent and a maximum of 40 per cent of ducks that are shot left injured to drown, bleed out or slowly die of starvation or predation. With hunters frothing at the mouth as birds fall from the sky to their deaths, I want to reiterate that these are native waterbirds. We are not talking about an introduced species; we are talking about native bird populations that are in significant long-term decline. The inquiry evidenced disgusting breaches by shooters with reports frequently dismissed and the impossibility of monitoring the vast wetlands, leaving hunters to ravage our native species and land with their guns. Not only is this an animal welfare and an environmental issue, as hunters crush the land beneath their feet and affect natural ecosystems, but it is also an issue of cultural destruction. At the very same time that we work to progress treaty in Victoria, the inquiry showed us evidence of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites being damaged or destroyed by hunters without any consequence.

All of this cruelty and destruction to appease less than 1 per cent of the population, with only half of them actually being active shooters, just does not make sense, and it begs the question: what is the government holding out on the ban on duck shooting for and who is the government protecting? Beyond ducks, this represents a frightening departure from democracy, with the government making a complete mockery of our procedures in ignoring the number one recommendation from this inquiry, which they not only formed themselves but chaired themselves. That we can gather all of the evidence, experts and professionals in this field and we can have the largest number of submissions for an inquiry to date in this Parliament expressing an overwhelming sentiment to ban duck shooting and the government would still disregard it all to make its own autocratic decision – that is not democracy. How can I and how can Victorians trust that the government is acting in the best interests of its people when it tosses aside the insurmountable amount of evidence and submissions contrary to its own personal desires?

My constituents are treating this decision as suspicious, and frankly I do not blame them one single bit, because so am I. I have not seen a single document or piece of evidence to point to to try to explain the government's decision. This is exactly why the community does not trust us as politicians – because at every chance this government gets it is failing them and it is failing our native wildlife. I will obviously not accept that shooting our native birds is a hobby or a sport or a recreational pursuit or whatever label the government wants to attach to it to self-justify killing native animals, and I will obviously not stop until duck shooting is banned, despite it now being a longer battle than initially

thought. Perhaps in viewing these documents we will have reason to believe that this was not a captain's call, but I suspect we will not. For the sake of transparency – and I note, if we even get these documents – I commend the motion to the house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:04): I rise today to speak on the motion put forward by Ms Purcell. At the outset I wish to acknowledge her long history of activism in this space. I note that her motion calls upon the house to require:

... the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution all documents relating to Victoria's native bird hunting arrangements pertaining to:

- (1) the decision-making for the government response to the Legislative Council's select committee inquiry into Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements; and
- (2) the 2024 season arrangements, including all communication between the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the Game Management Authority with the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, the Minister for Environment and the Premier.

As members in this place would well know, my position on this subject is quite well known. I did have the honour of serving alongside colleagues I can see right in front of me: Ms Purcell, Mrs McArthur and Mr Bourman – you are surrounded by them today, Ms Purcell; all your biggest fans are with you on the crossbench behind you and next to you – as well as Ms Copsey from the Greens. I see Mr Mulholland across the chamber, Ms Bath – I think we almost have the entire committee here – and our wonderful chair, which was Mr Batchelor, who is sitting to my left today. I have outlined my response to the government's response to the report in the chamber in a statement on the report in earlier weeks, and I will not seek to necessarily go over that in the same level of detail again today.

But in rising on this motion, and confirming that the government will not be opposing this motion today, I want to acknowledge the extensive contributions we received from many in the community and, to be fair, from both sides of this debate in those hearings. We received 10,402 submissions, which was by a measure of at least 8000 a singular record in the number of submissions ever received by a parliamentary inquiry in this state. I think that underscores the importance that many in the community place on this issue and the strong beliefs that are held by both proponents and opponents of recreational native bird shooting.

As Ms Purcell notes, the central recommendation, recommendation 1 of this report, was not adopted by the government. Other recommendations have been adopted, including ones which will, amongst other things, remove the use of lead shot, which is currently permitted for quails even though it has been previously banned for other species of ducks. Also, as part of its response to the report, the government will be implementing a variety of improved training mechanisms from the 2025 season, which, whilst again is not the ideal outcome that I was seeking, I acknowledge will make a significant difference towards improving the situation. If we are going to have this as an activity in Victoria, it is imperative that we do it in the safest possible way and that we reduce wounding as much as possible.

As I said in my earlier contribution, the proof will be in the pudding. We will see once that takes place, once those measures are in, if those wounding rates come down. For those who spoke to our committee most vociferously in favour of keeping it, if their predictions come true about those wounding rates coming down drastically, I will very happily bear witness to that. I think it is upon them as the hunting community, with the goodwill that has been extended by the government to them, to demonstrate in return their commitment to the practice of native bird hunting and killing being done in a way that is as safe and as least harmful as possible. We will see how that bears out.

I again wish to acknowledge that this has been a very long committee process. Despite what has been alleged, I think it has been a mark of democracy that we have been through this process, we have seen the outcome and we have seen quite strong responses from both sides of this argument as well. I also want to acknowledge that those witnesses that did appear before our inquiry, almost bar none I think,

engaged in that process respectfully, which was really, really good to see and appreciated by those of us on the committee. As I say, the government will not be opposing this motion.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:10): As is the custom with short-form documents motions, the Nationals and the Liberals will not be opposing the request for government to provide responses in relation to their documentation and their evidence around the select committee inquiry into recreational bird hunting and also the 2024 season, which was ultimately the call of the Minister for Outdoor Recreation.

I am just putting on the record that from the outset of this inquiry we had Minister Blandthorn stand up and actually say in her opening lines that she wanted to see the complete demise and end of native bird hunting. They were her opening lines. We also saw in that inquiry that it had a 5–4 split, if we can coalesce people into their positions. We had three from Labor; the Animal Justice Party member, who we have heard from and who has moved this motion; and the Greens. That is five. Then on the other side we had a Nationals member – me; two Liberals; and Mr Bourman. I would say that those of the four were not always comfortable with that split – for me, hanging out with Mr Bourman – but in this case we had a lot of agreement in relation to the science.

We wanted to understand and see the science in relation to this, and we did. We heard from scientists. We heard from professors Klaassen and Kingsford, who have been conducting a 40-year study, the eastern Australian waterbird survey. In that study they shared some of their very sensible comments. Also the government put forward a model, and that model, in conjunction with Klaassen and Kingsford, is the interim harvest model, which leads on to the harvest model. This is about a safe and sustainable model for duck hunting in Victoria. When I put to Professor Klaassen how robust this model was that he had worked on, he said:

Regarding robustness, I think it is robust. I think we did a good job there.

...

We proposed this model, and it was accepted. So for the 2022 hunting season and this year's hunting season the model was used to advise, ultimately, the minister to make a decision ...

There is a model there that the scientists, over 40 years, have compiled to advise the Labor government. If they are not independent, who is? The ecologists have come up with this model and have said it is robust and the government should be listening to it.

Of course from that model the Game Management Authority then takes on the advice. It includes a raft of elements of data: bird species, quantity, populations, water in the landscape – and it goes on. From that the GMA makes a recommendation to government. Over the past few years we have seen the GMA make recommendations to government, which are ultimately watered down by the minister. This year the GMA – in 2024 – made it a nine-bag limit per day and a full-length season. Indeed if you go back to the transcript and listen to those ecologists, they say the need to have that approximately full 12-week season actually leads to better outcomes not only for the safety and security of hunters and protesters but also for animal welfare, for ducks.

The minister reduced that nine-bag limit and full season down to a six-bag limit and an eight-week season. I am really interested to see what was behind that. With all the evidence and the scientists' model going through to the GMA, lo and behold, the minister made a captain's call on this. I think it is really important that we actually do see the evidence. I am interested for exactly the opposite reason to the member from the Animal Justice Party. She started off with a whole lot of inflammatory commentary around hunters crushing the earth when they go out to hunt. I am sorry, do protestors hover above the earth? I mean, it is just a silly, silly statement. I am looking forward to seeing this evidence, because it will corroborate the science around duck hunting continuing.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (10:15): Thank you, Ms Purcell, for moving this motion. The Greens agree with you, as do the 68 per cent of Victorians who want duck shooting banned. We are appalled by Labor's spineless decision to continue this barbaric practice.

Last year I was a member of the Select Committee on Victoria's Recreational Native Bird Hunting Arrangements, as were many members who have contributed to this debate. We recommended that the shooting season end for good. The inquiry broke the record for submissions. A ban would have seen Victoria join Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, which prohibited recreational duck hunting in 1990, 1995 and 2005 respectively. Shamefully, Premier Allan has ignored the results of her own government's inquiry and made a captain's call to announce that the slaughter of our waterbirds will continue. It is extremely disappointing to see the Victorian Labor government cave to pressure from the shooting lobby again. It is not the action of a progressive government; it is a cowardly decision that will guarantee the horrific deaths of thousands of waterbirds.

Ecological experts made it clear that our native waterbirds could be at risk of extinction if the annual slaughter is allowed to continue. Our native ducks are struggling. Waterbird numbers continue to see long-term decline due to drought and habitat destruction, exacerbated by the effects of climate change. We are in an extinction crisis. We do not need our native birds being shot. We know that so many Victorians will be feeling angry and disheartened by this decision, and we stand with them in solidarity and with activists. We will not give up. We will continue to fight alongside you until our waterbirds are safe.

The community deserves to know why Victorian Labor has gone against the recommendations of its own select committee, an inquiry that saw a record-breaking number of contributions – more than 10,000 – from people across our state, and given the go-ahead to another year of brutal slaughter of our native birds. The Victorian Greens will be proud to support this motion.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (10:17): This is awesome. I am not going to oppose this motion in any way, shape or form, because I know what is going to come out of these documents and, more to the point, I know what is not going to come out of these documents. There is no smoking gun. The facts, the science, the data and the logic spoke for themselves. The committee report had eight recommendations; the government took up seven of them. You cannot say they are ignoring the report, just that they ignored the recommendation that did not make sense. If the other seven did not make sense, why were they there?

A whole lot of stuff has been said, a lot of it inflammatory, but the science was there – not from citizen scientists with no training and no credentials but real scientists. The real scientists said that the problem is habitat destruction or a reduction in habitat. What that means is – I think the word was 'infinitesimal', and I hope I am not misquoting the actual scientist here – that the difference that duck hunting makes is infinitesimal. The problem is habitat reduction. If they were really that worried about duck numbers, they would be working on trying to preserve habitats, and that would actually mean working with hunters, because hunters do the habitat protection. They put in the breeding boxes. At Lake Connawarre they pull out all the foam and rubbish that blows out of the building sites and in there. I have not seen a whole lot of protesters doing that. Protesters and activists – they seem to protest and be active instead of actually helping.

I am going to finish up with a quote someone gave me: 'You can have your own opinion; you cannot have your own facts.' The facts spoke for themselves.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I rise to make a contribution on Ms Purcell's motion 354. It is a documents motion calling for the government to release a range of documents, but unfortunately I do not have very much time on the clock. Thanks to a change in the sessional orders brought about by Mr Davis and supported by the crossbench, I think I have got only a minute and something to go on it. They do not want the government to say anything about these matters; they want to gag us. Nevertheless the government's position on this motion is that we will not be opposing this motion.

Our record on documents motions is pretty clear. The government consistently upholds its obligations to the Parliament to provide responses to motions whenever they are passed. It is an accepted principle

that in some circumstances the government may withhold documents when disclosure would be contrary to the public interest. The basis for withholding documents is called executive privilege.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Mr Mulholland, I could take up your interjection and note that our record on documents motions is far superior to yours. In fact the LNP government provided no documents for 50 per cent of those motions that were brought in the 57th Parliament, so facts do outweigh people's opinions. Nevertheless the government does receive legal advice, including from the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, to inform its decisions to claim executive privilege. It is not appropriate to comment on the merits of individual government decisions to claim executive privilege in respect of particular documents. No doubt the government will go through its own processes and look to the information and legal advice that it receives in regard to providing any documents in regard to this matter.

I do want to acknowledge Ms Purcell's activism in this. Ms Purcell knows my position on ducks, which I am not going to go into now because this is actually about a documents motion. I know everyone wants to talk about the report, but I can say to the chamber: all of us sitting here on the benches today can actually read the report for ourselves, and selective quoting of it does nothing to aid that case.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Wildlife rescue

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (10:21): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) wildlife rescue is a legitimate emergency service that fulfills the government's responsibility to protect native animals;
- (b) rehabilitating wildlife often constitutes more than a full-time job but is largely volunteer led;
- (c) rescues have increased 40 per cent since this time last year unaccompanied by any additional funding;
- (d) industry and government rely on the work of rescue teams to tranquilise injured and displaced kangaroos, costing \$70 for a single Zoletil capsule;
- (e) volunteer rescue team, Vets for Compassion, spend upwards of \$20,000 annually to dart and relocate kangaroos;
- (f) Bravecto has proven to be successful in the treatment of mange in wombats but is inaccessible to carers, costing \$80 to \$100 per animal;
- (g) there are few vaccinated wildlife carers in Victoria equipped to care for threatened grey-headed flying foxes, in part due to the excessive cost of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) injections;
- (h) rescuers are without financial and resource supports and resort to savings and superannuation funds;
- (i) animal rescuers are struggling to balance paid work with volunteer hours, resulting in many leaving the field;
- (j) professionalisation of wildlife rescue will reduce the burden on highly skilled volunteers;

(2) calls on the government to:

- (a) investigate a reimbursement program for commonly used but self-funded medicines;
- (b) assess the feasibility of trialling paid full-time positions for wildlife rescuers; and
- (c) facilitate a round table to provide recommendations on how to further improve and better support the rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife in Victoria.

This morning is all about wildlife. I have stood in this place on numerous occasions to talk about the mass deaths here in Victoria. I have spoken about the avoidable massacre of koalas and greater gliders due to intentional deforestation, the killing and displacement of 3 billion animals in Australia during the bushfires of 2019–20, the relentless commercial and non-commercial slaughter of our beloved kangaroos and of course recreational duck shooting, which with this government's recent seal of approval continues to maim thousands of native waterbirds each and every year. In consequence, I also stood in this place as 48 native species were added to Australia's endangered species list last year.

So who comes to the rescue of these animals? I can tell you it is clear it is not this government. In their absence it is volunteers. Rescuers and carers are their only lifeline – teachers, vets, mechanics, accountants, retirees, who in their spare time choose to save a life. It is these very volunteers who preserved what was left of Cape Bridgewater's koala population during an unlawful blue gum clearing in 2020, it is these very volunteers who risk their lives in the blistering heat of annual bushfires to save abandoned animals and it is these very volunteers that spend hours every day cutting up kilograms of donated fruit to feed orphaned flying fox pups during a national food shortage. This community of dedicated and highly skilled rescuers dedicate their lives and themselves to the protection of our wildlife. I bet you are thinking that they sound like any other emergency service, and I am here to tell you that they are. They are overworked and burned out, performing physically demanding and life-altering work. However, a massive distinction remains: this emergency service is completely unpaid and unsupported. Currently, wildlife rescuers are forced to either watch injured animals die horrific and agonising deaths or to use their own savings, time, vehicles and resources to assist. Through the sheer compassion these people hold, they will always choose the latter, rescuing and rehabilitating animals with little to no government assistance at the detriment of their own health, safety and financial stability.

This government states on its own website that rehabilitation of animals by these rescuers is of limited benefit, but they have no problem claiming the biodiversity and ecosystem gains that native animals provide. This is such a gross display of disrespect that very clearly demonstrates just how little the government communicates with or understands the wildlife community. How could anyone possibly understand the impact this work is having if they are choosing not to see it? Not only do wildlife rescuers and carers bear the cost of transport, equipment and the provision of shelter, they also bear the cost of life-saving medical treatments.

Vets for Compassion are a small group of volunteer vets who are some of the only rescuers experienced enough to handle high-risk macropod rescue and relocation in Victoria. I have personally watched them successfully dart and relocate kangaroos from impossible scenes, everything from train tracks, pools, development sites, motorways and backyards. Their work is life saving for the animals involved, but it also significantly benefits the community by keeping Victorians and public areas safe. I cannot understate the demand on them to perform this challenging work. In just one day on the road with their team I travelled to over five locations, spending hours at each site to ensure a successful and stress-free rescue each and every time. The medicine that they use is called Zoletil. It is costing them \$70 per vial, which is enough liquid to tranquilise just two adult kangaroos, and if a shot is missed, it is lost. Without government support they rely solely on donations to afford this life-saving drug.

The same is true for wombat carers, who work around the clock to tackle mange, a horrific and deadly infection that, despite the best efforts of volunteers, continues to decimate wildlife populations. Researchers recently had a breakthrough in treatment options with a drug called Bravecto. It is a common medicine that is already used to treat fleas and ticks in our companion animals, but new studies have shown it can have huge success in the treatment of mange when applied topically to wombats. It lasts six times longer than other medicines and is the first mange treatment to be specifically researched for use on wildlife. For the first time in decades, wombat advocates see an end in sight for mange. But the problem is that Bravecto is completely inaccessible to the volunteers who are desperate to use it, at almost \$100 per treatment.

I have spoken a few times in this place about the need to protect grey-headed flying foxes in Victoria – or as we like to call them, ‘sky puppies’ – but I will take this opportunity to remind you once again that these remarkable animals are our only nocturnal long-distance pollinator. We rely on them to disperse seed like no other animal can possibly manage, and yet there is only a handful of registered and fully vaccinated carers and vets willing and able to treat them. Part of the reason for this is, despite some government assistance, the costs of receiving ongoing boosters to protect carers and vets from lyssavirus are excessive, only adding to the endless list of resources this cohort is expected to front up themselves. Heartbreakingly, it is volunteers who are forced to perform euthanasia on the bats that will not make it, because they cannot locate a clinic with vaccinated vet staff.

Take this as a warning: it is simply not possible for the current pool of rescuers to keep up with the ever-increasing intake of sick and injured bats, alongside the emotional burden that comes with it, without government support, but this motion seeks to change that. We must put in place a reimbursement system for Zoetilis, Bravecto and pre-exposure prophylaxis so that wildlife rescuers do not have to rinse their own superannuation funds to perform this work for the future of our environment and native animals. In fact we must do this for them to continue this work at all, because the burnout experienced by the wildlife community is alarming.

I would like to share with you just a few examples to highlight the sacrifices rescuers are making daily to keep our wildlife alive. Take Jude Lennox, who has been a wildlife carer for over 35 years and is currently a registered carer with Victoria’s Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, who contact her when native animals require care. Despite receiving most of her call-outs from the department itself, she is not provided with any financial assistance to do what is essentially their job for them. Or take field ecologist Rena Gaborov and her partner Joseph Henderson from Goongerah in far East Gippsland, who lost their home and previous shelter in the 2019–20 bushfires. Despite this immeasurable loss, Rena and Joseph have rebuilt and continue to make sacrifices to ensure they can feed the kangaroos in their care, who also lost their homes. They estimate they go through a \$590 bag of powdered milk every 40 days, again without any assistance from the government.

One rescuer from Bacchus Marsh, Trevor Crawford, wakes up to at least 14 call-outs for kangaroo rescues before 9 am on any average day. His weekly travel exceeds 1300 kilometres, costing over a thousand dollars per week in petrol to rescue between 25 and 45 kangaroos. He has noticed a large percentage of rescuers and shelters have exited the field recently. With shelters struggling to stay in operation, animals are being transported up to 2 hours away for treatment just to reach the nearest facility. Trevor’s work often involves rescuing kangaroos and wallabies from suburban yards, schools and swimming pools. Most days he will bear witness to horrific injury and death, yet he is still waiting to receive even a scrap of acknowledgement from this government for his crucial life-saving work. One thing Trevor shared encapsulates the severity of the position that our rescuers are in. He told me:

My fellow rescuers are very skilled; passionate and capable. It breaks my heart to see how stressed and worn out they are. Some have even been told by doctors – you need to stop, or you will die. How can we be in this position. How can we be left to destroy our financial future and potentially our lives trying to rescue the very animals that keep Australian tourism alive.

This motion also calls on the government to, for the very first time, listen to the concerns of this workforce they rely on each and every day. I am asking the government to do this through roundtable discussions as a first step to establishing an ongoing communication channel that is long overdue.

Wildlife Victoria recently revealed that rescues have increased 40 per cent since this time last year, and volunteers are filling in to meet demand where this government has failed. Not only are they relying on their devotion, but they are exploiting their compassion. As a final request to the government today I am asking that they finally investigate how to professionalise this workforce into the future. As a bare minimum we need to pay these rescuers in every region of Victoria, and this is needed because they cannot keep up with those phone calls. They cannot disperse the work between themselves. They are dropping their paid shifts in order to attend to these animals and using the very little money that they do make at work to pay for their care. Their burnout levels are so severe that

they are exiting in droves, meaning that animals are travelling long distances across parts of Victoria, particularly in my electorate, Northern Victoria, where animals will be transported for hours before they even receive treatment. What that means is that animals left in care at the shelter need attention, and these wildlife rescuers are spending all of their time and all of their nights tending to our native animals without any support at all. By professionalising this workforce and paying parts of it, we can support the remaining volunteer workforce and ensure that all call-outs are attended to, because that is the reality right now – that animals are suffering on roads and in public spaces for hours before a rescuer can even get to them.

The answers on treating our threatened wildlife are being laid out before you today. The hard work is already being done by the volunteers, who are often balancing full-time jobs to perform a function that this government omits. All that is left for you to do is to support them by voting in favour of it. Do not wait until our national icons are extinct, with no excuse but to say we did not listen to the pleas of volunteers or to shamefully admit that we simply did not want to help them. If you cannot find it within yourself to care for our wildlife, then at the very least I invite you to care for the people who are suffering at the hands of this government's neglect. These reforms are the very bare minimum of what these rescuers and animals are owed and deserve. For the people of this place to reject this reform would be to sentence thousands of animals to their deaths or to bury rescuers both financially and emotionally, so I commend the motion to the house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:33): I also rise to speak on motion 350, which has been put forward to us by Ms Purcell, and I am very pleased to be speaking in favour of this motion today. At the outset I would like to acknowledge the incredible work of our state's rescuers and wildlife volunteers –

Georgie Purcell interjected.

Michael GALEA: I appreciate that, Ms Purcell. I do very much appreciate them. They work incredibly hard most of the time as volunteers – they are not being paid – to care for animals at the times when they need it the most. We often talk about the amazing heroes of our communities, both paid and unpaid, most notably nurses and emergency services, and I think that far too often wildlife carers and volunteers are the unsung heroes that operate day in, day out. Growing up in a very outer suburban, exurban part of Melbourne, it was all too common to see the yellow road signs with the number for Wildlife Victoria. I had a vague understanding that there was a service you could call, but growing up I did not have a great deal of understanding of just how that worked.

Fortunately for me, I recently had the opportunity to actually spend an afternoon with the team at Wildlife Victoria, and I want to at the outset acknowledge and thank both Lisa Palma, their CEO, and also Meg Butler from their team for graciously welcoming me and having me there to see what they do firsthand. It was a really good experience for me to be able to see just what our wildlife carers are actually doing. I was able to visit their headquarters in Abbotsford and I saw firsthand the call centre. Frankly, at first impression I was very impressed given the scale of the operation that they operate from in that call centre. It was not two people sitting around a desk, it was teams, it was screens, it was notice boards and whiteboards, all coordinating their responses to be as effective as possible with the limited resources they have. I think it is fair to say that with those limited resources they have done an outstanding job. Victoria is actually just one of two states that has a statewide wildlife response service,

Georgie Purcell interjected.

Michael GALEA: And they are very busy. In other states even services such as that are much more ad hoc and organised locally, so we are in fact quite lucky to have Wildlife Victoria operating the way it does, working day in and day out to support people as they need it.

I had the opportunity to listen in to a couple of the calls came through to the call centre, and I would like to also thank Jess the call taker for patiently explaining to me the process and guiding me through as we had calls about some wildlife. It was actually a very, very hot day on the day that I was with

them – it was about a month ago, just a few days prior to the dreadful storms – so there were a lot of heat-related distress calls that were being received by the centre that day. It was great to hear that professional, patient advice being given. Many of the call takers, Jess included, are currently undertaking studies in this space and looking to expand and continue to work in this space once they graduate, so it is a really perfect fit for them to be able to do that work and support the public in the process.

Of course I did not get to go out to five in one day like Ms Purcell did, but I did have the opportunity to see Lisa Palma switch hats from CEO to volunteer as we went out onto the road to do a wildlife rescue. We rescued a possum from the back of a doctor's clinic in Prahran, which had very sadly had a form of concussion from I believe hitting its head on a pipe and also some heat-related stress as well. We were able to rescue that possum, escort it away safely and take it to their veterinary clinic in Nunawading where fortunately, with the good care and support of their Dr Tian, who is an amazing veterinarian doctor who went to work, that possum has now had a full recovery as I understand, which is really lovely to see.

The work that Wildlife Victoria does and wildlife rescuers big and small do right across this state is something that all too often goes unnoticed, but it is something that I really think bears paying attention to. It is also why I am so pleased to be rising in support of this motion today, because the more support that we can provide in this space the better the outcomes for our wildlife will be – the better the biodiversity and environmental outcomes of course too – but above all it is about ensuring that these precious animals are supported and given the best care, love and support possible in their times of distress. So I strongly encourage anyone who is in this place who is interested in finding out more about their work to reach out and engage with them to see exactly what they do. Of course I encourage members of the community more broadly as well to absolutely engage if you see an animal on the road, in a park, wherever you are out and about, even in your backyard. If it is in distress, if it is part of our wildlife or one of our native animals, please absolutely do reach out to Wildlife Victoria.

In one of their recent annual reports they provided a snapshot of the species which they most commonly attend to, and I think those figures are quite telling and worth mentioning here today. The most common species which they attend to is the ringtail possum. In one year they attended to 8501 ringtail possums. The second-most treated animal was the eastern grey kangaroo, 8476; followed by magpies, 3891; then in fourth, brushtail possums, 2391; and in fifth spot, rainbow lorikeets, 2245. As you can see, they are quite extreme numbers. While some of the staff such as the call takers are paid, the vast majority if not all of those rescuers are in fact volunteers. It is a really, really wonderful service, and I want to acknowledge again the hard work of those people who day in and day out care for our native wildlife. It is a very special thing.

I think as a species we should often be marked on how we treat those most vulnerable in our communities and in our societies but also marked on how we treat our precious animals, so full appreciation from me to Wildlife Victoria. It is also why I am so pleased to be speaking for a motion that will provide more attention to this space. I know that it is something that Minister Dimopoulos is particularly interested in as well, and I am very grateful to him that he has been so willing to engage on this topic. I look forward to having further conversations myself with Minister Dimopoulos, as I am sure others in this chamber have and will continue to do so, including Ms Purcell, about getting the best outcome here and about getting that change where we need it, because I know he is particularly interested in that as well.

Of course it would not be the first investment that this government has made in this space. We have made available about \$5.4 million in funding specifically for wildlife rescue and wildlife foster carers since we have been in government as part of a package of \$582 million more broadly to biodiversity support. Earlier this year in fact we did also see the latest round of the Allan Labor government's wildlife rehabilitator grants program, which does provide up to \$3000 in funding to wildlife shelter operators and foster carers. There is also an additional \$230,000 to support 102 wildlife organisations, which has included 34 wildlife shelters amongst them. These grants are all part of the government's

existing commitment, so it is fair to say that there has already been a significant body of work going into this. I welcome the opportunity that we have today to discuss expanding that and doing much more, as much as we can, noting of course that we have had a number of very successful grant applications as part of these programs, which I have just mentioned.

As a member of the government I look forward to continuing to work internally – as I said, Minister Dimopoulos is very keen in this space as well – and look forward to engaging with others in this place, in particular my colleague from the Animal Justice Party Ms Purcell. This is an important issue. The way in which we treat our native wildlife is very important. We do have a variety of challenges that they are facing. Without going too much into the other controversial topic which we have already spoken about this morning, when it comes to native bird life what our committee report last year found overwhelmingly was that the biggest contributors to their population decline were climate change and land use. That is something that we need to be mindful of for all our species, especially as our suburbs continue to grow. There are a lot of exciting things happening in the planning space too under Minister Kilkenny for realigning that as part of the housing statement so we are not continually protruding into more and more growth areas, which will of course support our wildlife as well. I could keep talking much more, but my time is up. I commend the motion to the house.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:44): I rise to speak on motion 350, and this is a matter close to my heart in fact. A couple of years ago, in 2022, I convened a forum of wildlife rescuers from across Victoria. We met in Whittlesea, and I sat down and asked them, ‘What is it we can do for you to help your work?’ It was an incredibly educational experience. The first thing to understand of course is that the amount of road deaths of our native animals is jaw dropping. I think if the wider community understood that, they would be scandalised by what it is. What also I learned and began to admire is that the amount of volunteer work done by those wildlife rescuers, often in very awkward and unpleasant situations, is in effect a service they are performing for the community out of sight and out of mind of the mainstream community. We actually owe them a great debt of gratitude because they do those services in their own hours, at their own cost and at their own emotional cost a lot as well.

Obviously cleaning up dead carcasses on the edge of the road is not pleasant, and if you are doing that relentlessly, day after day, and rescuing a joey or an infant animal, it is very, very unpleasant. A lot of people do not realise that the council’s role typically begins and ends at moving the carcass off the carriageway, and then they leave it, and it is up to a volunteer to come and then actually rescue or dispatch or untangle or gather up the remains. It is very unpleasant work. The distances that these people have to travel to do it is sometimes significant. When we talk about euthanising some of these poor injured animals, I know that we only have about four licensed people in the whole of the state to go and dispatch them, so they have to travel in some cases 300 kilometres to do it.

There is an awful lot in the motion that I look at and that is familiar to me, and I think, yes, that is right. As to the demands on them, I can take away all the emotional stuff and just talk about the tangible, practical things you can do. The biggest impost on them is cash flow, because the way the system works now they incur all the costs to do all this service and they can put in a claim to get it reimbursed at the end of 12 months. So their cash flow is directly impacted. And cash flow is not merely just petrol and time. Cash flow literally is that they have to pay for the bullets that they use to euthanise the animal as well. The cost of rescuing a kangaroo, if you get a little joey, from getting it to some point where it can be reintroduced into the wild is anything between \$800 and \$1400 per animal as well, so I do believe that there is more we can do to support them.

I think this motion has some key elements, but there are others that are not there: the cash flow part, the travel part and the counselling. I think they are a form of first responder, and they do carry a psychological burden for doing so, so they should have some access to counselling and mental health services. One of the other really big areas I think we can improve on is data. At the moment the animal rescue community, if I can call it that, is actually not one community, it is several communities. I do not want to use the word ‘fractured’, but they are different ecosystems if you like. So the data gathering

that goes on actually is also fractured. Whilst we have some numbers from Wildlife Vic and from government here and there, we actually do not have a proper, comprehensive view of what is going on. Most importantly, from my perspective, we do not have, for example, heat maps of which animals are getting injured where and in what quantities. We do not actually know as a state where we should be making the improvements to road design or urban design or creating animal passageways, because we are not collating the data properly. If we did that properly, we would then have more effective responses, and then the burden on the rescuers could I think be substantially lessened.

The only real area that we disagree with here is the idea of professionalising this group, and it is not because I do not respect the work they do. It is quite the opposite, actually – it is because I do respect the work they do. Wildlife rescuers generally do this as a vocation because they love animals and because they have an absolute life passion for what they are doing about it, and I think that ethos would fundamentally change if we professionalised it. It would simply have the effect of hollowing out that volunteer group, pushing the volunteers out and bringing a professional class in, and suddenly some of the things that the volunteers do would fall outside the remit of their job description, and you would find that a lot of the things that they do above and beyond what anyone would normally do would not get done. I think the ultimate result would be a very expensive bureaucracy that does a worse job at actually tending to these animals. I think rather than replacing volunteers we should be focusing on empowering them, and there are simple, practical things we can do to empower them so that they can continue to do the extraordinary work they do.

Of course we should look at urban design and we should look at simplifying the way animal injuries are reported, because that is also very, very difficult. There are little signposts: you are travelling at 100 kilometres an hour on a freeway and a signpost flashes by you and you are meant to be able to remember the number and type in a nine- or 10-digit number as you travel. I think there are more practical things to do, and there is already a community doing it. So I think we should empower them and make some fundamental changes before we add a bureaucracy, which I think will do less. We will not support this just on that basis, but I encourage everyone to continue to contemplate and work in this area. I hope to be part of that. I will leave my contribution there.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (10:50): I commend Ms Purcell for bringing forward this motion for debate. Wildlife rescue volunteers and organisations have been really clear that they are being called on to rescue more birds and animals. They are victims of the frontline impact of climate change, of habitat and biodiversity loss, of the variable weather patterns we are experiencing – extreme heat, storms and cold snaps – and of growing urbanisation. All of that means that our wildlife have fewer wild places to live in and be safe. This year of course all the brave people who rescue injured and maimed ducks through the duck-shooting season will continue to have to do so, given Labor's shameful decision to green-light further shooting of our native ducks in 2024.

Wildlife are incredibly important for our biodiversity and for environmental health. They are impacted daily at the grassroots level, and wildlife rescuers are on the front line. I had the privilege last year of visiting Wildlife Victoria, the state's largest rescue organisation, and I was so pleased that day that I got the chance to meet an orphaned baby ringtail possum and also Apple, the wombat joey, who will stay in my heart forever. Wildlife Victoria operates 24/7. They take over 110,000 calls from the public each year for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. They are a not-for-profit service that saves the lives of thousands of native animals each year, day after day all across our state.

We have heard contributions in the chamber on just how hard that work is, just how much personal initiative is shown by volunteers and their passion for rescuing these animals. They fill a key gap that would otherwise exist in our government services. Demand for rescue services has grown year on year, and last year we saw a 50 per cent increase in calls from the public at Wildlife Vic compared to the same time last year. For that level of increase alone, more funding and support is required. We have heard that it is being experienced across the state and that there are currently many activities being undertaken out of pocket by volunteers. I am very pleased to hear that the government will be

looking at this issue. I thank Ms Purcell again for bringing this issue to the chamber. More funding and support are clearly required across the sector, and the Greens will be supporting this motion.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:53): I rise to speak on the motion regarding wildlife carers of Ms Purcell. The motion notes that (a) wildlife rescue is a legitimate emergency service that fulfills the government's responsibility to protect Victoria's native animals, (b) rehabilitating wildlife often constitutes more than a full-time job but is largely volunteer led without compensation, (c) rescues have increased 40 per cent since this time last year unaccompanied by any additional funding to reflect this increase, (d) industry and government rely on the work of rescue teams to tranquilise injured and displaced kangaroos, costing rescuers \$70 for a single capsule of Zoletil, (e) volunteer rescue team, Vets for Compassion, spend upwards of \$20,000 annually to dart and relocate kangaroos, (f) Bravecto has proven to be highly successful in the treatment of mange in wombats but is currently inaccessible to carers, at a cost of \$80 to \$100 per animal, (g) there are few vaccinated wildlife carers in Victoria equipped to care for threatened grey-headed flying foxes, in part due to the excessive cost of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) injections, (h) rescuers are without financial and resource supports and resort to savings and superannuation funds to fulfill the demand of animal rescue, (i) animal rescuers are struggling to balance paid work with their volunteer hours, resulting in many leaving the field, (j) professionalisation of wildlife rescue will reduce the burden on highly skilled volunteers across Victoria. The motion also calls on the government to (a) investigate a reimbursement program for commonly used but self-funded medicines, including Zoletil, Bravecto and pre-exposure prophylaxis, (b) assess the feasibility of trialling paid full-time positions for wildlife rescuers and (c) facilitate a round table to provide recommendations on how to further improve and better support the rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife in Victoria.

The government will not be opposing this motion that has been brought forward by my colleague Ms Purcell. I want to acknowledge first and foremost the hundreds of wildlife carers across Victoria who help to protect our native wildlife. Wildlife carers face down bushfires, floods and even widespread disease, all to save our precious native animals from harm. They help nurse these animals back to health, they give these animals shelter when they need it and they help protect some of the most vulnerable and endangered species in the world. But it is not just disease and natural disasters that they have to deal with – accidents between vehicles and wildlife on the roads are all too common. Last year there were nearly 7000 collisions between vehicles and eastern grey kangaroos alone, which represents about 65 per cent of the total number of reported incidents of animals in Victoria being hit by vehicles. In situations like that wildlife carers and volunteers are essential to helping kangaroos or any other animals get on the mend after colliding with a truck or a car.

Across Victoria there are more than 700 registered volunteer wildlife rehabilitators who play a role in that crucial task of rescuing and caring for injured or sick wild animals in this state. Rehabilitators, care centres and shelters all work in tandem with one other for the common goal of delivering aid to injured and distressed animals across Victoria. These organisations are also properly regulated under the Wildlife Act 1975, ensuring humane and adequate care is being delivered up to standard.

Together we can ensure that we are delivering adequate care to habitats and the environment and to the wildlife. We can do that here today, and we can do that by supporting passionate wildlife carers and their work. Caring for Victoria's hundreds and thousands of wildlife animals requires a lot of dedicated wildlife carers and volunteers, all of whom are vital to our efforts to preserve our native wildlife and environment. To put it in perspective, there are over 6200 native animals and plants in Victoria. Of that, over a third are of conservation concern, meaning they are rare, endangered or near endangered. Victoria, and Australia as a whole, has a unique ecosystem with native animals found nowhere else in the world. It is important that we do what we can to protect and preserve these species.

Caring for these animals and protecting them is hard work, and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the Minister for Environment in the other place, Minister Dimopoulos, and Wildlife Victoria, who do fantastic work in protecting our wildlife and native animals. This government is committed to supporting these shelters, rehabilitators and wildlife carers, and I believe

the record reflects that clearly. Earlier this year the Minister for Environment announced the recipients of the latest round of the Allan Labor government's wildlife rehabilitator grants scheme. It helps those wildlife carers and rehabilitators to look after and help injured, sick and orphaned animals in our state. The Victorian wildlife rehabilitators grant is the government's annual grant program which invests in our state's various wildlife organisations, such as rehabilitation and volunteer organisations for carers. These are groups that do the hard work in protecting our native wildlife and help nurse sick and injured animals back to health as well as looking after those animals that have been orphaned or otherwise stranded.

The latest round of the wildlife rehabilitator grants has now issued \$230,000 to 102 different wildlife organisations, all of whom contribute to the rehabilitation and care of Victoria's wildlife. Foster carers and wildlife shelter operators were eligible for up to \$3000 in support for their operations under this grant program last year. The various recipients included 34 different wildlife shelters who continue to care for thousands of different native animals across Victoria, like kangaroos, koalas, wombats and possums. Since 2015 our Labor government has invested over \$5.4 million into wildlife rehabilitators and carers, and we have embarked on the largest investment in Victoria's history towards biodiversity and the environment. Our investments, which totalled over \$582 million over the last eight years, are helping us push towards our aim of reversing the decline and loss of biodiversity in this state under the framework of the *Biodiversity 2037* plan. That includes \$3.5 million towards the Nature Fund, which is an addition to the existing \$10 million this government has allocated to the fund, which will help preserve and promote the biodiversity of Victoria by addressing threats towards endangered species through developing suitable habitats.

We have \$10.6 million invested towards incentive management actions for 22 iconic species across our state. We have also spent \$6 million since 2018 towards protecting and restoring natural habitats for native animals to help stop and reverse the decline and invested \$1.6 million over the last three years targeting the preservation of marine biodiversity and marine wildlife in Victoria, and \$32 million in investments are going into the 36 different large programs focused on managing various invasive species in key locations across Victoria. One of the most important and effective ways we can protect our native wildlife is through the coordinated management of hostile invasive species such as introduced pests and predators, which is exactly what the \$32 million is going to do. On top of that there is also BushBank, an investment of nearly \$77 million into the redevelopment, restoration and preservation of natural habitats through the planting of plants and trees across Victoria. Of that fund, nearly \$31 million will go towards habitat restoration on private land as well.

These are not small figures. They are important projects with concrete funding and concrete goals to turn around the decline of native wildlife and promote the biodiversity of this great state. The government is serious about reversing this downward trend, and I believe our spending commitments in this area reflect that loud and clear. Our government has a proven track record of investing in the future of our diverse wildlife, and these investments follow in the tradition by ensuring our state's wildlife carers, rehabilitators and shelters have what they need to continue their hard work protecting our native animals. These organisations and workers are essential to not just the delivery of the *Biodiversity 2037* targets but also the basic survival of much of Victoria's native wildlife. They are the people who look after the kangaroos who unfortunately come into collisions with vehicles. They are the ones who take in and look after the koalas after a bushfire or look after countless other animals after a flood ravages their natural habitats. We cannot say for sure how much worse the situation for these animals would be without the work that the carers and shelters do, but we can say for certain that there are hundreds of thousands of native animals that are alive today because of the work they have done. That is why programs like the wildlife rehabilitation program are big, because of all the work they have done. I am proud of what we have done in this state for native wildlife and for wildlife carers, and I look forward to supporting carers, rehabilitators and wildlife shelters for years to come.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (11:03): I am pleased my parliamentary colleague Ms Purcell has raised this motion. Wildlife rescue is a legitimate emergency service which fulfils the

government's responsibility to protect Victoria's native animals. This issue is important for two broad reasons in my view: one, our native wildlife forms part of a vital core of our biodiversity and sustainable ecosystems. If one link in an ecosystem becomes out of balance or weakened, then the whole system can be damaged and become unsustainable. Strong diversity of native animals is important to our sustainable future and our prevention of climate change.

A second reason is that how we treat injured animals and those who are vulnerable is a reflection of the values we uphold as a community, and as I have mentioned in this chamber before, there is a relationship between animal abuse and family violence and sexual assault. For example, the use of cruelty to a pet as a threat to maintain control and power over a victim usually instils enormous fear. Clients have told me over the years of the horror and the fear of those circumstances. In Victoria we continue to change the culture of violence towards women and children, and making clear value statements about the needs of vulnerable animals is an important part of that social transition – a transformation that, I might add, has a very long way to go.

Rehabilitating wildlife often constitutes more than a full-time job. At the moment these roles are largely volunteer-led, without compensation. There are many individuals – community members, veterinarians and rescue organisations – involved in animal rescue in our state, and the south-west is no exception. I have recently seen this with great clarity, having visited the Mosswood Wildlife centre at Koroit in my electorate late last year. It was a humbling experience to see firsthand the way Tracey and Peter Wilson have dedicated their lives and their home to koalas, as well as ducks, magpies, wedge-tailed eagles, possums, penguins and even lizards. They are providing the closest thing the south-west has, in a way, to a dedicated wildlife hospital. I felt both moved and grateful for, and also somewhat overwhelmed by, the enormity of the task they are taking on – literally running on small grants and donations and investing their own time and livelihoods into running the centre. They have some dedicated volunteers helping to share the burden, including a wonderful vet who performs surgeries night and day on a pro bono basis.

As Ms Purcell points out in her motion, surgical materials and medicines are a significant cost when running a shelter. It is certainly something that was raised with me at Mosswood. It seems logical to investigate a reimbursement program for commonly used but self-funded medicines, particularly when in Victoria sick, injured or orphaned wildlife can only be rehabilitated by a wildlife shelter, operator or foster carer who is authorised under section 28A of the Wildlife Act 1975. This is important, as wildlife rescue and rehabilitation requires a range of skills. They include safely capturing and handling distressed wildlife, performing first aid, surgery and sometimes euthanasia as well as providing appropriate food and safe and comfortable enclosures, all with the ultimate goal of successfully releasing animals, once recovered, back into their native setting where they belong.

The increasing need for rescues across the state due to factors such as more bushfires and more vehicles is also putting pressure on those who volunteer to rescue native animals, so assessing the feasibility of trialling paid full-time positions for wildlife rescuers in regional areas makes sense. I would like to know that the Allan Labor government understands the values and community concerns about the impact of bushfires on wildlife in Victoria. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) has established a wildlife field assessment team to locate and evacuate wildlife in fire-affected areas. The team also engages with affected communities and supports accredited wildlife rehabilitators in tending to injured animals.

This component of the emergency response is saving lives. During the Pomonal fires only a few weeks ago emergency relief centres in Ararat and Stawell had dedicated accommodation for pets and companion animals. We know only too well that facilitating the rescue of animals during fire emergencies saves lives. In fact during the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983 in Nullawarre my grandparents' lifelong neighbour delayed his escape from the fire front to open a gate so his stock could escape. That decision, that care for his animals, cost him his life.

We now have additional tools available to respond to animals during emergencies. The Wildlife Emergency app allows users to report wildlife impacted by bushfires and other emergencies to DEECA. The report collects basic information and photographs and, if appropriate, confirms a location. Speaking of apps, this takes me back to the learnings at Mosswood. They have produced an app to track the movements of koalas in the Koroit and Warrnambool areas. It will encourage councils to be informed about where to plant more trees, including more nutritious, koala-friendly eucalyptus trees. As Tracey Wilson told the *Standard* at the app launch on 16 October last year, we need to have evidence of koalas' existence and movement in our towns and cities to allow us to influence the relevant organisations in the creation of wildlife corridors. I was intrigued to learn from Tracey of the different varieties of eucalyptus and that some species of koala prefer different species of eucalyptus – in fact some only eat one species of eucalyptus.

The idea of helping the migration of wildlife as we green our environment is of course not new, and the Habitat 141 project, which basically is a vertical area heading up the South Australia–Victoria border, provides a beautiful vertical north–south wildlife corridor for animals to traverse. There is an unofficial corridor that koalas have themselves created between Tower Hill and Framlingham Forest, and they certainly pop in to my family's farm at Winslow on their way across. They are a noisy bunch as they sit in the trees that my parents and I, and my children as well, planted decades ago.

I am pleased to say that I am working with the minister's office to deliver enhanced wildlife services in Western Victoria. I support this motion not just because this is the right thing to do but also, as is included in the motion, because Ms Purcell has proposed to investigate a reimbursement program. To investigate is to look into the logical evidence base that might support that and also the costs that it might incur. It also proposes to assess the feasibility of paid positions so that there can be a reliable response to animal emergencies and to facilitate some consultation as well. I would have to say that that approach to investigate, to assess feasibility and to do consultation is a huge improvement, a huge level and step so much better than the thought bubble that we have had to tolerate in this chamber from the Greens around cost of living and the Essential Services Commission. I thank you for your initiative today and fully support this motion.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (11:12): I rise to speak on the motion moved by Ms Purcell as well. I will not speak for too long, but I do want to make a few quick points. The rescue and the saving of animals is important, and no-one denies that, but I think the main point that we are trying to make is about the professionalisation of this service, which suggests that it is not professional already. There is one point in here, point (b) of part (1) of the motion, that asserts that rehabilitating wildlife often constitutes more than a full-time job. I just think that is an assertion that really does not have any sound basis. To make that assertion is to try to suggest that it cannot be handled, and there is clearly work being done in that space at the moment. But an assertion like that I do not think is probably based on a full set of facts.

A member: What assertion?

Joe McCracken: In point (b).

The other point that I would make about this is that this motion points at a very narrow set of volunteers that do work. If you want to treat volunteers in a way that reimburses them and pays them and if you want to investigate paying them, I would also point to the fact that there are a number of other volunteers across the state that are in the same situation that do not get paid. I think of the fires that impacted parts of my electorate recently in Western Victoria. There are CFA volunteers and SES volunteers that for a long period of time have operated in emergency situations and have not been reimbursed or paid at all. They are not paid; that is why they are volunteers. But there are also other volunteers that provide services to the community, such as driver safety and Clean Up Australia. They are not paid either. So if we are going to pick a narrow set of volunteers to investigate, maybe we should think about how we think about volunteers and how they are treated and the broader picture – what is the point of volunteering if you are not freely giving your time and you want to be paid for it?

I just think that is something to really think about and be careful of. I do hope that when you call for an investigation it really does look at the costs as well, because I note that costs have not really been spoken about here in terms of a reimbursement program or what it might cost to have a trial to pay full-time employees to do this sort of work. I think that if there is to be some rigour around that, that would be quite helpful to understand what actually is intended here and on what scale that might be as well. The professionalisation of this is probably not something that I support, and I do not think we should be supporting this motion.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:15): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion in regard to wildlife carers, and I note that I too have a passion for all things wildlife. In fact I have in the boot of my car a shopping bag full of blankets and sheets in case I –

Georgie Purcell: A rescue kit.

Sonja TERPSTRA: A rescue kit? I maybe would not elevate it to that high level, but it is certainly a care kit. If I do need to attend to an animal that is in distress, I can do that. I know people here will not like me talking about this example, but I am going to give it anyway. One time I was driving from my house down towards Rosanna Road, which is a major road near where I live in Heidelberg. Sadly, a fox had been hit, and it was a big fox. In fact it was such a big fox I thought it was a dog, so it was huge. The issue is on Rosanna Road there are a lot of trucks, and that would have very quickly ended up being a hamburger kind of situation. Nobody wants to see that. That is distressing. In fact I thought the animal was still alive. It did have some blood running from its nose. Anyway I pulled over, got out my rescue kit from the back, wrapped it in sheets and picked it up. I thought, ‘Well, it may come to and bite me.’ Nevertheless I then took it to the vet. Sadly, it probably had recently passed away or passed away in the back of my car.

I guess the point of that and why it relates to wildlife and animal care is that I also believe that no matter what animal, living thing, whatever, it deserves a dignified death. It does not deserve to be left on a road to be run over, not to mention the fact that having a large animal like that on the road may actually cause damage to vehicles and the like. I try and look for the humanity in things. I know some people may not think that is the thing for politicians to do, but I think everything deserves a dignified death. Anyway, as I said, I did take it to a vet, which was an emergency vet, one that is in my electorate as well, and it is a really good vet. They are open at all sorts of weird hours to tend to all sorts of animals: feathered, furred and the like.

I understand that the life of a wildlife rescuer is also one that involves very odd and weird hours. You can be called upon at any time to provide assistance to wildlife. It could be in the early hours of the morning when someone is calling to say ‘Hey, I found an animal on the side of the road’ or ‘There’s a dead animal that’s got babies in its pouch’ or whatever, whether they are joeys or wombats; it could be anything. It is definitely a labour of love, and I think that people who go into this role are very caring and absolutely dedicated to providing that care for our wildlife. As I said, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation are rewarding but can be physically and emotionally demanding. As I just talked about, it does require a range of skills, including safely capturing and handling distressed wildlife, administering first aid and in exceptional circumstances performing euthanasia and also providing appropriate food and enclosures.

I am fortunate as well to have the Yarra River that goes through my electorate, and of course we do have a large number of kangaroos that frequent along the Yarra. I know that in Heidelberg as a suburb, whilst parts of it run along the Yarra, oftentimes I have seen kangaroos actually make it across Rosanna Road and make it into shopping precincts, which is always very concerning, and some of these kangaroos are actually quite large. Obviously people who live along the Yarra and live in parts of my electorate are alive to the fact that whilst we are very fortunate to be surrounded by beautiful surroundings – parklands, bushlands and the Yarra – and because it is healthy, we have a range of wildlife, kangaroos and the like but also birdlife. Unfortunately, when that wildlife meets with houses, cars, roads and the like, it can be very confronting and then you have animals who get injured.

In Victoria sick, injured or orphaned wildlife can only be rehabilitated by a wildlife shelter operator or foster carer who is authorised under section 28A of the Wildlife Act 1975. Wildlife shelter operators and foster carers are collectively known as wildlife rehabilitators. These rehabilitators are authorised to acquire, receive, possess, destroy, euthanise and dispose of wildlife. Their dedication and commitment to Victoria's native wildlife is highly valued by our government and the community. I guess no greater example of that was provided than during the recent bushfires when we saw so many koalas injured and distressed as a consequence of those fires and the amazing lengths that people went to to rescue them, to take them out of harm's way when fires were coming through, and to then take them to places where they could be cared for and rehabilitated.

Victoria's wildlife and environment volunteers and volunteer groups have enriched our natural environment and way of life beyond measure, and we have a strong history of environmental volunteering in terms of caring for our wildlife. It is a good thing. I note that during 2017 we released our *Biodiversity 2037* plan, which is our ambitious 20-year plan to halt the decline in our biodiversity and improve outcomes for our precious threatened species. In fact since we came to government in 2014 we have invested over \$582 million into biodiversity, so this is the largest investment in environment and biodiversity by a Victorian government ever. That is something we should be incredibly proud of.

There is a lot of work to do, and I know our friends on the crossbench like to talk about the climate emergency, but people do forget that part of that is biodiversity and our biodiversity is also an important, critical factor in what our climate is telling us. Often what we heard during the ecosystem decline inquiry, which I chaired last year, was that habitat destruction can and does impact our wildlife. Also the imbalance perhaps between introduced species and native species can mean that there can be an overpopulation of some pest species. I note today that we have Pumbah the dingo attending Parliament. I look forward to meeting Pumbah. Pumbah was going to come in during the ecosystem decline inquiry but did not quite make it in for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless dingoes are an apex predator, and they certainly perform an important function in rectifying any imbalances, particularly with pest species. They perform an important role.

I only have a few minutes left on the clock, so I might just talk about the important role that the Allan Labor government has played and will continue to play in providing support to biodiversity and our native wildlife. As I said, since we came to government in 2014 we have invested over \$582 million into biodiversity. That is the largest investment by any Victorian government in its history. Over \$22 million was committed to biodiversity and the natural environment in the 2023–24 state budget, and this included \$2.1 million to continue our protecting our faunal emblems program. I know we have made some significant gains and improvements in protecting our native fauna and flora. There was over \$7.4 million to protect our parks, pets and wildlife, including the creation of a wildlife hospital in south-western Victoria, which is critically important; support for the Wildlife Emergency Support Network; continuation and expansion of Zoos Victoria's wildlife outreach program; support for Wildlife Victoria to run the wildlife hotline; over \$2 million to make our coastlines and coastal ecosystems more resilient in the future; and budget outcomes related to biodiversity in addition to over \$60 million in ongoing funding for the 2023–24 financial year. We also launched online the *Victorian Wildlife Rehabilitation Guidelines*. That is a long-running project, with work commencing back in 2010 in partnership with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and Zoos Victoria.

There is lots more that I could say on this topic, and I know other speakers will have more to say as well. But I just want to give a shout-out to our wildlife carers, who dedicate their precious time towards caring for our injured wildlife. They really do perform an important function, and I want to thank them for their dedication and commitment to that cause. It is a labour of love and it is a very challenging role, but our government does support wildlife carers in their pursuit of making sure that our wildlife can be cared for when they are unfortunately injured and then of course can be rehabilitated with the purpose of ensuring they can return to the wild and be rehabilitated where that is in fact possible.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (11:25): I very much appreciate an opportunity to get up before the chamber and speak on this motion before us from our colleague Ms Purcell. I want to reflect on some of the contributions of my colleagues and thank them so very much for sharing their lived experience with animal rescuers as well as family experiences and folks that they know and they care about. Can I take a moment to say that this is a very, very detailed motion, and I certainly appreciate all the efforts that have gone into it. I note that the government is indeed supporting it today. There is so much in it that when I was reflecting I thought ‘Where do I start?’ because the truth is that some of our wildlife rescuers are such incredible folk in our community who do it so selflessly. But some of the points that were raised in this I think were particularly pertinent, particularly with respect to training and education about the workplace health and safety of these volunteers, areas around having appropriate equipment to do their job but also medications required to do it safely. So thank you for being so very detailed in this motion, Ms Purcell.

I also want to note that in Victoria sick, injured or in fact orphaned wildlife can only be rehabilitated by a wildlife shelter operator or foster carer, and I think that is really an important distinction to make. These guys are collectively known as wildlife rehabilitators. Amongst all the good that they do, it also includes possessing, receiving, acquiring and indeed, sadly, sometimes euthanising our wildlife for the purposes of their care, treatment or rehabilitation. Sometimes you get the good moment to release them back into the wild, which I am sure makes the very many hours that our rescuers spend worth it. Can I also just say that the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) do also work to respond to wildlife needs during emergencies, including fire and other declared emergencies.

I know that so many have spoken with such interest around wildlife rescuers on land, so I thought perhaps I could speak about wildlife rescuers in our sea country, because we know that it is a little bit more complex and it is a little bit more challenging when it comes our sea life and the needs for wildlife rescue there. I particularly want to take a moment to recognise the work that traditional owners play in recognising flora and fauna on country but also in protecting our wildlife, particularly native wildlife. The ones that come to mind for me are turtles. Even though the motion does not make a particularly pointed mention of turtles, it is one that I have a personal connection to. Some folks might know that turtles are an especially sacred totem to many of our traditional owners, and when they do come ashore and need assistance, there is not only a response that happens from first responders that are traditional owners because the turtle needs help but also a deep and profound cultural obligation to do so, especially for those of us who enjoy the turtle as our totem.

I have been a part of some turtle rescues in more northern waters than these, and I remember with great affection the wildlife rescuers that were around us. Of course it is perhaps worth mentioning the work of Victorian wildlife rescuers rather than the good folks up north, but I will say that when we have these emergencies, which seem to happen all too frequently in our state, there are provisions under the *Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan*, which is led by DEECA, to respond in emergency planning response and recovery phases to address concerns for animal welfare in an emergency. I am really happy to see that there is a definition of the roles and responsibilities of agencies and organisations and their operational interactions with other folks in the emergency response. These include contributing to human safety and community resilience through planning and the management of animals in emergencies, and ensuring animals are better considered and protected from suffering during and immediately following emergencies.

What I recently discovered – so thank you for bringing this motion before us – is that there is actually a wildlife emergency app that allows folks to indeed report wildlife impacted by bushfires and other emergencies to DEECA. It collects some basic information but also, if it is appropriate, you can include the addition of photographs and confirm the location. Sometimes, as we know through recent emergency weather events, the internet is not able to be connected to via these devices, but I will tell you that you can save that response – so if you are out somewhere and you have this app and you want to take some photos and respond with the location et cetera, when you do get into a cell-service area you can then in fact submit that data using the internet connection. So I would just say to folks that do

spend a lot of time out and about in places that may mean that they interact with wildlife in emergency situations – or even not in emergencies – that there is the emergency app that can be downloaded from an app store. So there you go; I feel like I am an advert for apps and emergency response technology at the moment. It does not always work, but it seems to me that the folks behind this one have worked out how to make a response as easy as possible.

I also just think that there is a little bit more that we could be doing, and so I thank Ms Purcell for bringing this motion before us. Of course I am reflecting back on 2019–20 and the fires and what we saw with some really, really difficult images on our screens. What that did show was certainly a need for much stronger support and coordination within our wildlife emergency response. That is why the Wildlife Emergency Support Network was created following those fires – to train and accredit veterinarian teams and these wildlife rehabilitators to assist the department to undertake wildlife welfare activities on really large scale fires. So thank you to the folks who really pushed for that, because I am sure in the events that have happened since that, it was a very central part of our agency response.

I would say that the Allan Labor government has continued to invest in this Wildlife Emergency Support Network and deploys its members alongside of DEECA, who of course have skills that can be effectively utilised to assist wildlife and aid their recovery in these troubled times. It is also worth noting that sometimes the rehabilitation of these animals requires quite a medical response, including the allocation of prescriptions and medications, sometimes even chemicals. I am thinking particularly of fires. The use and prescription of these medicines and chemicals is in fact a very tightly controlled and regulated environment. This means that there is in fact a national system that has come about to be there to enforce this. Thank you for this motion, which I think will raise some questions about how we can make that system more effective, with a considered overtone of the protection of public health and safety. Of course the veterinarians that prescribe medications for wildlife rehabilitation must do so following various acts of our Parliament.

I would love to tell a story, but I do not have one that immediately comes to mind except for a big, old turtle that I found up on the central coast. It will make me cry, and I do not want to go there, so I will leave my comments there.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:36): It is a pleasure to stand and speak to this motion on wildlife rescue reform and to follow on from Ms Watt and many of her comments. I am fortunate to represent the region of Eastern Victoria, with its spectacular natural beauty and spectacular natural places, and within those is natural wildlife. Whether it is the Mornington Peninsula; Phillip Island, famously known for its little penguins; South Gippsland; the Strzelecki Ranges; Wilsons Promontory; the Dandenongs; West and Central Gippsland, going up into the mountains; or East Gippsland, from the lakes going all the way up to the New South Wales border with some incredible remote wilderness into the mountains, there is such an incredible abundance of wildlife but also a diversity of wildlife across all those regions that are all spectacular. It is why so many people choose to live across the region and its different areas, because of that natural environment and the wildlife that lives within that spectacular natural environment.

People living in those regions will come across wildlife that is in trouble for different reasons. Obviously we see seasonal changes, particularly in drought, when animals that perhaps otherwise would be staying within a particular area are on the move looking for food or water. Otherwise we have situations like we saw particularly in 2019–20 when we had natural disasters where mass migration of wildlife occurred to escape either fires or floods. We also have wind events, as we have seen recently. It is an incredible thing that we have volunteer networks that are prepared to come together and support our wildlife in the times that they need help most.

I also want to take the opportunity to acknowledge groups such as our Landcare groups and our farmers that are working to not only protect habitat but enable more habitat with weed management and making sure that no matter what animal it is, they have that habitat to live in. We think so much

of birds, and the plantations that farmers are putting in that assist their livestock and assist their farms in general are also wonderful places, particularly for small birds. We know that they need that condensed bush space so they can get in and breed and be safe from larger birds. As Ms Watt or Ms Terpstra said about introduced species, they will often give some of our wonderful native birdlife a pretty hard time.

I want to acknowledge the work that our farmers and our residents do in our local communities and regional towns. I was out with Minister Dimopoulos in Mirboo North and Arawata just a few days before the storm event came through, looking at the work farmers are doing to put in multi-variety pastures with up to 12 different seeds. These types particularly do not require herbicides or pesticides, and we are seeing lots of animal life within that, which is encouraging birds and other things. Then as I said before, the plantations become corridors, and Ms Ermacora spoke about one coming off Tower Hill in her region. Once those corridors are in place, you are enabling animal movement to get between the bigger areas that they can live in. You are enabling that movement in times of emergency, but you are also enabling that movement for breeding, crossing and ensuring that there are as many species of animals in a place as possible, whether that is to enable that biodiversity or whether those animals are working well off each other being in a similar area.

I just wanted to pick up specifically on the wildlife rescuers themselves. Rescue and rehabilitation are not only very rewarding for our volunteers but critically important for our injured wildlife. But it can be physically and emotionally demanding, and it does require a range of skills. To safely capture and handle distressed wildlife is something that does require a lot of skill, because particularly with some of our bigger wildlife it could put Good Samaritans trying to do the right thing and help out in danger's way and harm's way. There is also administering first aid and, where necessary, euthanasia, because we do not want animals being in intense pain and discomfort when there is no other option, and of course providing food and enclosures. We need to do this in a way that does not stress animals and that maintains their natural behaviours. I know from growing up on a farm that if you are supporting lambs you have just got to be mindful of the way you are handling them so that the ewes will take the lambs back as their own and not reject them, so across all wildlife we have got to be mindful to do the same thing.

In Victoria sick, injured or orphaned wildlife can only be rehabilitated by a wildlife shelter operator or a foster carer who is authorised under section 28A of the Wildlife Act 1975. Wildlife shelter operators and foster carers are collectively known as wildlife rehabilitators, and wildlife rehabilitators are authorised to acquire, receive, possess, euthanise and dispose of wildlife for the purposes of the care, treatment and rehabilitation of sick, injured or orphaned wildlife for release back to the wild. Their dedication and commitment to Victoria's native wildlife are highly valued by this side and of course our community, because as I said before, it is an incredible thing that they do. Not only does it take up a lot of their time and goodwill but also it can put them in harm's way. Victoria's wildlife and environment volunteers and volunteer groups have enriched our natural environment. It is very hard to measure the impact of their work. It is phenomenal.

Victoria has a strong history of environmental volunteering, with volunteers contributing enormously to improving our environment, our local communities and our economy. I spoke before about Landcare and the incredible the work they do, but there are so many other groups. This government has worked with all environmental volunteers, volunteer groups, the community and government agencies to explore how to maintain, support and grow the volunteering sector. We will continue to listen and to support those groups in every which way we can, recognising these challenges in supporting the work that volunteers are doing and enhancing environmental volunteering through the coordination of those volunteers' work. Supporting, improving and expanding the environmental volunteering sector in Victoria will contribute directly to the vision and goals of *Biodiversity 2037*. In 2017 we released *Biodiversity 2037*, our ambitious 20-year plan to halt the decline of our biodiversity and improve outcomes for our precious threatened species.

Since we came to government in 2014 we have invested over \$582 million in biodiversity, which I think is critically important. A number of my colleagues have raised the bigger challenge of climate change. We know that the impacts of climate change are going to affect our wildlife as a different climate is moving in on our animals. I think this investment is absolutely critical to ensure that when we talk about that biodiversity holistically, the holistic collection of our wildlife has the best opportunity to thrive that is possible. This is the largest investment in biodiversity by a Victorian government ever. I would just like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (11:46): It is a pleasure to sum up on this debate. I want to thank all of the members for their contributions today and the clear love and passion for our wildlife. Just during the debate actually I had a number of wildlife rescuers and carers texting me, saying how exciting it is to hear this debate going on. One of my wonderful constituents, Sam Brand, actually sent me a message coming back from a barbed wire rescue with a bat. Sam is also a wonderful wombat carer, who I must note specifically texted me after Mr Galea's contribution to say that Mr Galea gives 'wombat daddy vibes' and 'All MPs are welcome to come out to the shelter.' I would really encourage not only Mr Galea but all of my colleagues.

Members interjecting.

Georgie PURCELL: I must note I think it is on the physical appearance, not anything else.

Bev McArthur: What? He is far more handsome than a wombat.

Georgie PURCELL: No, wombats are beautiful. It is a compliment, Mr Galea. I need to take up the Libs' opposition to some points to this; I need to pick up Mr McCracken's comments. To anyone opposing this idea of paying our wildlife rescue workforce or considering professionalising them, this motion just calls for investigating the feasibility of that, and it is something that the wildlife community has been asking for for some time. I think the very least we can do is just listen to them on that, because they have been unheard and unsupported for so long.

Mr McCracken also said that there are other volunteers who are not supported. I really just do not think that this is an argument to not support our wildlife community. We should be supporting all of the volunteers in this state. In the wildlife space they are not the only ones that are having volunteers drop off. We see it across the board in all volunteer workforces. This could be a really great precedent to set to further support the volunteers in our state. Because the reality is that not only are the wildlife rescuers leaving the community because they are burning out and cannot financially support their own work anymore but we are also not gaining wildlife rescuers and carers. People are not rushing to do this work, because they know how hard it is and how all-consuming it is. I think a very important distinction between this volunteer workforce and other volunteer workforces is the fact that this work never stops. If they are not rescuing an animal on a roadside, they are giving one a bottle at home and they are getting up every 2 hours to check on them. Particularly in those early stages, kangaroo carers would know it is all through the night. They are on night shift and they are on day shift ensuring that those animals survive. The very least we can do is give them the support they need in order for them to continue to do it.

Obviously the government and a number of the crossbench parties have said that they will support this motion today, and I am very, very grateful for that. I am looking forward to hopefully, if this motion is successful, working with the minister very quickly. We need to do this work quickly. We cannot delay this work. We need to begin consultation and start listening to this community, who have been begging the government and other politicians to hear about their plight – not only their plight but most importantly the plight of our native animals that we are running the risk of losing in this state. We need to do this work before it is too late. We cannot come back from it, because as Ms Copsey said, we are in an extinction crisis. Some of the animals that we love and know and see regularly are under threat, and then there are many, many more who are suffering and in long-term decline. On that note, I commend the motion to the house once again, and I look forward to all of your support today.

Council divided on motion:

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

Noes (13): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

Motion agreed to.

Business interrupted pursuant sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Maternal and child health services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): (469) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, in last year's budget the Labor government's mental health and wellbeing levy cost Victorian businesses \$912 million. Despite this revenue stream intended to provide mental health services, a recent review revealed that there are serious gaps in mental health checks for pregnant women and new mothers. Half of Victorian mothers are missing vital screening for postnatal depression, with one in four experiencing anxiety, one in five experiencing depression and one in 10 experiencing obsessive compulsive disorders in the perinatal period. Minister, given businesses are providing over \$900 million for mental health and wellbeing, why are mothers missing these critical health checks at a time when they are particularly vulnerable to developing mental ill health conditions?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:00): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. This is a very important issue. Of course the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System did outline a very clear road map for reform to the mental health system. The government did pick up on every single recommendation and commit to implementing them, including creating a levy that would help fund the reform of the mental health system. That levy does go into many different parts of the mental health system in terms of the rolling out of the 74 recommendations of the royal commission, but it certainly did outline the critical importance of perinatal mental health for parents and their infants taking a family-centred approach. We know that unfortunately anxiety and depression affect up to one in five new mums and indeed up to one in 10 new fathers, so this is work that is a focus for the Allan Labor government. We want to make sure that new and expectant parents have the supports that they need and have better access to vital perinatal mental health supports. We want to build that compassionate, inclusive and responsive mental health and wellbeing system in Victoria, and we have certainly wasted no time in investing in this area.

In the 2023–24 budget, for example, we invested \$10 million to support mothers and families experiencing acute mental health and wellbeing issues during the perinatal period through programs like PANDA, which I am sure Ms Crozier is familiar with. In addition to supporting the mental health of parents and families during pregnancy and the first year of parenthood, PANDA delivers important statewide intensive care coordination services which provide for mothers with more complex perinatal health experiences. We have also got the perinatal emotional health program, which is about improving early intervention and treatment of antenatal and postnatal mental health presentations for expectant and new mothers and parents, and in December 2021 we announced an investment of more than \$100 million to deliver Australia's first specialist dedicated women's mental health service in metropolitan Melbourne and Shepparton, which will support more than 750 Victorian families. There is additional work being undertaken by Minister Thomas in the health portfolio, including centres to support new parents in Victoria, and it will certainly remain a strong focus of the government to make sure that these services are available.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): Minister, thank you for your response. Your electorate of Western Metropolitan Region is one of the worst areas where new vulnerable mothers are missing out on these vital checks and services. Five years ago, as you mentioned, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommended immediate action to address the workforce crisis. Yet maternal and child health nurses and other clinicians were reluctant to screen women because 'timely access to the right services is not available'. Minister, how many new mothers have not been referred to a mental health practitioner because there are such limited mental health services available?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:04): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question. I have tried to outline in some detail what the specific supports are for perinatal services in the mental health portfolio, but I am not responsible under the general order for maternal and child health.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, it is actually about the referrals to a mental health practitioner because the services are not available, so it is in relation to Minister Stitt's portfolio. But I am very happy for her to take it on notice if she wants to.

The PRESIDENT: There is no point of order.

Ingrid STITT: In response to Ms Crozier's supplementary, what I think I indicated in the answer to the substantive question was that we were closely looking at ensuring that these services are providing that vital support and early intervention. The government has made significant investments in this area and will continue to follow and implement the recommendations of the royal commission in respect to this matter.

Gender identity

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:05): (470) My question is for the Attorney-General. In 2021 the Parliament passed the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021. Whilst there was broad support for some of the general aims of this legislation, some people, including me and my party, were concerned about some of the specifics of these laws, believing that they went too far. One positive element of this legislation, however, was that it had an in-built mechanism for an independent review of the legislation within two years. My understanding is that this review should currently be underway. My question for the Attorney is: who is conducting the review and what is the current status?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:06): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. I will have to seek some advice in relation to making sure I can provide you an accurate answer in relation to your question, and I will endeavour to do that asap.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:06): My supplementary was related to the review. As I did not get an answer, I am not sure that I can ask it and make sense. I shall await the Attorney's response on the review.

A member: You can ask it anyway.

David LIMBRICK: All right. One of the more complex and controversial areas in transgender medical care is related to therapeutic interventions for children experiencing gender distress, with several jurisdictions, most recently the NHS in the UK, moving away from the routine use of puberty blockers. Despite this lack of consensus, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission have listed on their website as some of their examples of conversion practices a parent denying their child access to healthcare services that would affirm their child's gender identity and also a parent rejecting the recommendations of qualified health professionals and refusing to support their child's request for medical treatment that would prevent physical changes from puberty. These examples were recently and rather curiously removed from the human rights commission's website. My question is: was this a result of the independent review's examination?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:08): Mr Limbrick, the reason it is wise for me to take your question on notice is because although I have legislative responsibilities connected to VEOHRC and indeed the legislation, a lot of the issues that you have drawn on come from other portfolios, particularly health. It is on that basis that I will come back to you with some information in relation to the review and the scope.

Ministers statements: Country Fire Authority

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:08): Last Thursday I was in Burwood with the Plenty CFA brigade to officially announce the \$138 million upgrade of all handheld vehicle- and station-based radios for the CFA. A total of 18,000 new radios will be rolled out across all of Victoria, giving Victorian emergency services the latest tech to respond to emergencies more safely. They are fitted with updated and more accessible functions, including GPS capability, so that firefighters can more easily locate and communicate with their crews on the ground, ensuring their safety. The new multiband capabilities of the radios will ensure firefighters have direct communication access with all other emergency services agencies, not just CFA volunteers. The function will be particularly valuable during mass fire events, like the ones we saw over summer, where more than one emergency responder is needed, such as VICSES, FFMVic or FRV in conjunction with CFA vols. The radios will also give CFA crews direct links to New South Wales and South Australian counterparts, ensuring better communication with interstate fires when we have incidents that obviously do not stop at borders. The announcement follows a three-month pilot program across 15 CFA regions where the radios underwent an extensive trial, tested in hot, smoke-filled and noisy environments by volunteers who know what they need in the face of a possible disaster. I certainly thank those brigades that undertook that testing for us.

Following the last couple of weeks of extreme weather, we have seen just how important our CFA volunteers are and the incredible job they do keeping Victorians safe. Whilst we cannot thank them enough, we can make record investments in the equipment and technology that they need. Again, I am sure that everybody joins me in acknowledging and thanking volunteers for the work they do in protecting Victorians, and I look forward to seeing these new radios across Victoria as they roll out to each and every brigade.

Homelessness

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:10): (471) My question is for the Minister for Housing. Every time there is a long weekend or a major event in regional Victoria, rates of homelessness rise. This is because homelessness services are forced to rely heavily on hotels and motels for emergency accommodation. When these fill up during major events, there is nowhere for people to go. The sector's reliance on hotels is a result of people staying in transitional housing for longer periods because of a failure of government to build sufficient public and community housing. Support services are resorting to giving people tents, and we are seeing more children sleeping rough than ever before. Minister, is it the government's plan to continue to rely on motels for emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:11): Thank you for that question. It is an important question because what it demonstrates is the complexity of delivering solutions across the housing continuum, ranging from crisis accommodation, homelessness support services and transitional accommodation through to social housing, the private rental market and then ownership. We know that in addressing homelessness we also need to address the causes of homelessness. The objectives around the work that we are doing in Victoria, which I am also very clear in pointing out the merits of to the Commonwealth in seeking support and additional funding, relate to the objective that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurrent. One of the things that we do know is that it is necessary to have a range of accommodation options available for people experiencing homelessness so that in particular in circumstances of unusual need – for example, natural disasters and emergencies – we can rely upon

the accommodation sector to provide support to people who are experiencing homelessness. We also know that in extreme weather events it is necessary to consider accommodation in the hotel sector, for example, to make sure that people have respite from the heat.

We do have the largest total recurrent expenditure on homelessness services across all jurisdictions. That accounts in Victoria for about 36 per cent of the national total. In the 2023–24 year we have got \$67.5 million over four years and \$12 million ongoing for the Housing First responses to address chronic homelessness, including From Homelessness to a Home and, under a revised model of that, the Homes First model. We know that in being innovative and also responsive to need as it changes, a variety of hotel accommodation and other options are necessary, and that differs depending on whether you are in the middle of Melbourne or out on the outskirts of the state. But when we talk about bringing additional social housing on line, it is important to note that when and as we do this we are partnering with community housing organisations who provide that wraparound care. St Kilda mission, the work of a range of other organisations and the partnerships, for example, with the Melbourne City Council are all inherently important in making sure that in addressing the importance of brief, rare and non-recurrent homelessness we are providing those solutions. The work that we have done with Homes First has meant that by building From Homelessness to a Home into that model we are seeing around 90 per cent of people who get that accommodation not then returning to homelessness, and that is the objective. But as I said, it does cover an entire continuum, and that is why the record investment that we are making across social housing is so important.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:14): I thank the minister for her response. Minister, you mentioned that it is understandable that in times of, say, natural disaster you might need motels for emergency accommodation, but this is a very real crisis that has occurred. With Taylor Swift coming to town, we heard from services that they were not able to get accommodation – it is not quite the same as a natural disaster. The *Spirit of Tasmania* coming to Geelong has knocked off a number of motels that were regularly used for crisis accommodation. You also mentioned the goal of homelessness becoming rare, brief and non-recurrent. Well, it is common, chronic and becoming recurrent. In your response you mentioned the role of homelessness services. Despite homelessness support services having to turn away 86 people on an average day in Victoria, the government has actually announced it is going to be cutting funding from the From Homelessness to a Home program, so that means that support for rough sleepers will be cut by 75 per cent. Given these levels of unmet demand for emergency assistance, why are you cutting funding for homelessness support?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:15): Thank you for that supplementary question. As I indicated in the answer to your substantive question, we need to bring additional social housing on line in order to address homelessness and the demand on the system that currently exists. That is why the investment that we are making, including in redeveloping the tower sites with a 10 per cent uplift in social housing, is so important. That is also why in addressing affordability and availability we are going to ease pressure on the sort of rental accommodation that is currently able to be accessed to support people experiencing homelessness. When we talk also about homelessness supports – and I touched on this in my answer to your substantive question – it is revised service models such as Homes First that are able to deliver that support and that care in a way that is really setting world standards for how wraparound services are provided. We know that From Homelessness to a Home, implemented as an emergency response, was part of the response to the pandemic and those challenges. That work goes on through Homes First. I am really happy to give you a briefing on that work as it continues.

Water policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:17): (472) My question is also to Minister Shing, as Minister for Water. I refer to PAEC's report *2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes*, specifically finding 91. In 2021–22, the report states:

... four metropolitan water corporations paid a combined total of \$301 million in dividends and capital repatriations to the general government sector, followed by \$80.2 million in dividends in 2022–23. Budgeted capital repatriation payments, totalling \$209.9 million for 2022–23 were deferred to 2023–24 at the request of ... Treasury and Finance.

That is a total of \$591.1 million. Minister, isn't this the cause of high household water rates, as the government sucks the blood out of our water corporations to cover its surging deficit?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:18): Mr Davis, you present me with a somewhat tricky situation here in answering your question. It is either a very short answer or an opportunity for me to in fact use the allotted time and take much more time in order to address the issues that you have raised. Let me start with the short answer: no. Let me then go on to the longer answer. You have combined in this sort of pseudo-biblical way an effort to create a metaphor of blood and water. I am not sure where that was intended to go, but what I will confirm for you, Mr Davis, is that here in Victoria –

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: Okay. 'Victorians are concerned about their water bills' is what you are talking about? Right, they sure are. I am very pleased, Mr Davis, to assuage any concerns that you might have and indeed be promulgating about the water bills that we have in comparison to other jurisdictions. We have the lowest water bills in Australia, Mr Davis.

Members interjecting.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, the level of noise in here is next level, and I cannot hear the minister's answer.

The PRESIDENT: The minister will be heard in silence.

Harriet SHING: Thank you very much. Mr Davis, when we do talk about pricing – I am loath to have to go there again, but I will to assist you in understanding where we sit – we know that Melburnians' water bills are \$88 below Sydney, \$83 below Canberra, \$107 below Adelaide, \$920 below Darwin, \$658 below Perth and \$540 below south-east Queensland. We also know from the ESC's report of 2022–23, Mr Davis, that the typical Victorian residential water customer received lower bills in 2022–23 compared to the previous year. Statewide the typical bill for owner-occupiers decreased by about \$10 to \$986 and for tenants it decreased by \$18 to \$428. Mr Davis, again, I have just read out to you the statistics around how much people are paying for water in Victoria –

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: When you say 'too much', it is the lowest in Australia. I am really keen to make sure our water corporations continue to deliver on the benefits and that they make sure they are focused toward delivering.

It is also about reducing waste and making sure we can identify leaks. Mr Davis, we are looking at South East Water having delivered 1 million digital meters for water by 2029–30. That is billions of litres of water, Mr Davis, and that is about making sure we are also keeping household bills low and identifying network challenges. The ESC sets prices, Mr Davis. I do not know how many times I can say it, but you would be wise to listen.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): The minister went nowhere near answering the fact that these could be lower and that they are higher than they should be. Nonetheless, I ask the

following question: noting that the government has already said that \$209.9 million will be torn out of our metropolitan water authorities in 2023–24, will the minister now rule out any further dividend or capital repatriation being torn out of Melbourne water authorities prior to 30 June this year?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:22): Mr Davis, what a pivot from you. First, having failed to make any sort of case around water bills and pricing, because you are not actually using facts in the way in which you are drafting your question and are off on some kind of random frolic, Mr Davis, again I just want to make sure that you are aware of and you understand the nature of capital repatriation and dividends payments –

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: Well, Mr Davis, I will take you up on that interjection. If you understood – if you actually understood – the way in which capital dividends and repatriation work, Mr Davis, you would understand that all 18 of our water corporations are financially sustainable, and the Auditor-General –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, I believe the minister is debating. Could you bring her back to the question?

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was being relevant to the question. It was very hard for me to even hear her because the person that asked the question started yelling at her. I will get the minister to continue.

Harriet SHING: Thank you very much. With the remaining time I have, Mr Davis – I am happy to go here time and time again should you wish – most water corporations have less debt on their balance sheets than the equivalent entities in the private sector. All of our water corporations are financially sustainable. I will see you again for this question next sitting week.

Ministers statements: Whittlesea mental health and wellbeing local

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:23): I rise to update the house on the walk-in mental health supports that are now available in Whittlesea. On Friday I joined the member for Mill Park Lily D'Ambrosio and the member for Yan Yean Lauren Kathage to visit the service's permanent location in South Morang. The Whittlesea service is one of 15 mental health and wellbeing locals operating across the state, supporting people experiencing mental illness or psychological distress, including those with co-occurring substance abuse or addiction concerns, providing treatment and care in their community and closer to their support networks.

Since October 2022 provider Neami, alongside partners the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Drummond Street Services and Uniting Vic.Tas, has delivered telehealth services for people in Whittlesea and the surrounding community. But I am pleased to inform the house that residents can now access the mental health and wellbeing local at 1 Danaher Drive, South Morang, seven days a week or can call to arrange a face-to-face or telehealth appointment at no cost. We are delivering mental health and wellbeing local services across the state, ensuring all Victorians will have free, easy-to-access mental health care and support close to home whenever they need it, without making them jump through hoops like a GP referral or meeting eligibility criteria.

Local mental health and wellbeing services are just one way we are transforming our mental health system, making it easier for more people to seek out responsive and compassionate support, because that is what every Victorian deserves. Thank you to the team at the Whittlesea local for showing us around on Friday and for all the amazing work that they are doing throughout that community.

TAFE funding

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:25): (473) My question is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE. Minister, during question time yesterday you failed to divulge the completion rates

for Victorian students who have completed a free TAFE course since the introduction of the initiative. However, you did say that we know the completion rates are in line with university retention rates. Given you are aware of what these figures are for university retention rates, why won't you provide the completion rates for students who have studied for a fee-free TAFE course in Victoria?

The PRESIDENT: I am a bit concerned about the same question rule. I am not going to pretend my memory is excellent, but that sounded very similar to the question Mr McCracken asked yesterday. I am happy for you to ask it again, Mr Mulholland. We might be able to bring up on our magic computer what was asked yesterday. Do you want to?

Evan MULHOLLAND: It was in response to an answer that she had given to a question.

The PRESIDENT: I respect that, but what was the question itself?

Evan MULHOLLAND: I am asking about information she gave in an answer.

The PRESIDENT: The preamble is different, I respect that, but the actual question sounds like exactly the same question Mr McCracken asked yesterday. Just ask it again so we can hear.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Okay. Given you said that we know the completion rates are in line with university retention rates, what is the benchmark for university retention rates, and is the completion rate for fee-free TAFE higher or lower than that?

The PRESIDENT: That is a different question. I take it that you have rephrased it. Minister, do you want the question again?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:27): No. That is the point, President – all I am getting from those opposite are questions that are repeated. They are repeated here in question time week after week. They are also repeated in questions on notice. They are also repeated in adjournments. I have answered and answered and answered. In terms of the issue of university retention rates versus VET retention rates, I have answered that in PAEC a number of times as well. So all I ask you to do is read the answers you have been provided and read the transcripts in terms of PAEC previously.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, I asked whether the benchmark was higher or lower than university retention rates, which she said she knew of yesterday. Is the benchmark for fee-free TAFE higher or lower than that?

The PRESIDENT: I might be wrong, but that sounded like a different question to the second one. I apologise. My advice is that it was rephrased. As far as the point of order goes, the minister can answer in any terms she likes. Her answer is that she has actually responded to this before and she has given an answer. I cannot force the minister to answer in a way that makes the person asking the question completely happy; that is not my role.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, Mr Mulholland was asked to rephrase his question, which he did, around the benchmarks. The minister had a minute's rant complaining about answering questions because we keep asking them. That is our job and we will continue to do it. I would say that she can answer it any way she likes but we will continue to ask this. We are asking her to answer that simple question on the benchmarks.

The PRESIDENT: I think that is more of a statement than a point of order.

Gayle TIERNEY: I will continue to state what I have previously provided answers for, because they are the facts. The other fact is that it is clear to me that those opposite are either lazy or indeed sticking to their agenda of not having one idea to bring to the table in terms of vocational education and training in this state.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, the minister's responsibility in question time is to answer the question, not to simply attack the opposition, and that was what she was doing. She was moving into a full-on attack on the opposition and actually not answering the question.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order. There are a number of previous rulings, and one of my favourite ones was from President Smith. He said – I cannot remember his terminology – something like 'It's not the minister's role to goad the opposition in an answer.' I uphold that point of order. I would have thought the point of order too was that the minister was debating the question, and she was.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:31): Again, on the supplementary, given the closest the minister went to answering the question yesterday was saying that we know the completion rates are in line with university retention rates, I ask the minister: what exactly are the completion and retention rates for Victorian students in our universities?

The PRESIDENT: I do not think that is the responsibility of the minister or her administration.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The minister does have responsibility for universities in Victoria under her portfolio and has referred to it in answers.

The PRESIDENT: I am not too sure if she is responsible for completion rates.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, a minister answers questions on their portfolio area or matters with which they are connected. In the sense that the minister has actually referred to that benchmark, she is entitled to be questioned about it.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to put the question, and the minister can answer as she sees fit.

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:32): Again I would suggest that those opposite actually do some homework and have a look at what has already been provided and what has been put in *Hansard*. In terms of being the higher education minister, I have got specific responsibilities in that portfolio. Retention rates of the universities are not my responsibility but are a point of fact that I can refer to.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): I move:

That the minister's response be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Bail reform

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:33): (474) My question is to the Attorney-General. Last year you removed the provisions relating to children from the Bail Amendment Act 2023. You committed to the development of separate reforms to keep children out of custody while:

... providing an approach to bail that recognises the unique vulnerabilities and complex disadvantages that children ... can face.

However, this morning we heard that the government has dumped these reforms. There will be no presumption of bail for children, and instead there will be a trial of electronic monitoring for children on bail. So my question is: what information has led to the government so dramatically reversing its position on this reform?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:34): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question. There are a few issues I have with the way you framed your question. Announcements in relation to electronic monitoring today for bail compliance are not instead of other reforms in the bail space. You will appreciate that last year we spent a significant amount of time debating the bail reforms, and indeed we did last week because members of the chamber wanted

to revisit the will of the house in relation to reforms that are designed to ensure that vulnerable nonviolent alleged offenders are not inappropriately remanded and that we can focus our bail tests on those who pose an unnecessary or unacceptable risk to the community. When it comes to children, we have very low rates of children in remand and custody, and we have had the Minister for Corrections take us through that on several occasions.

I have spoken in depth with justice partners about practical implementation issues of child bail models. The most substantive proposed change, presumption of bail – so assessing whether a child is an unacceptable risk or not – is what is already occurring. I think you and I had an exchange – I know some members of the Greens, Ms Copsey in particular, did – about what is happening in practice. The reality is that when bail decision makers, particularly in the courts, are having conversations with Victoria Police and lawyers that represent children, the vast majority if not all of those young people are meeting the test of exceptional circumstances. What the conversation comes back down to is whether they are an unacceptable risk or not. That is what is happening in practice. It is our proposal that that is an appropriate setting because that is what is happening. It is the risk to community that is being assessed by the bail decision makers, and that is where the settings will remain.

There is a youth justice bill coming to the Parliament. It has been under development for some time. That will be midyear, and that will contain the consideration of electronic monitoring for bail compliance. It will raise the age. It will have a number of other programs and legislation that are all about embedding our approach to youth justice, which is driven by diverting as many children away from the justice system as possible. But when it comes to bail considerations, as I have described what is happening in practice, that will be unchanged in the youth justice bill. Whilst we introduce electronic monitoring it can be informed by that evidence and continued conversations with those with experience in the system. *(Time expired)*

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:37): I thank the Attorney for her response. You have also announced the trial of electronic monitoring for children on bail. This policy failed to make it through Parliament in 2018. It is opposed by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and, as of a few minutes ago, Save the Children. It deprives liberty and does not reduce offending. In defending this government's previous position against this monitoring in 2024, Deputy Premier Carroll noted existing powers to track young offenders and the powers of the Youth Parole Board. Attorney, you have said that you do not want to create a debate about 'a youth crime crisis that doesn't exist'. Attorney, will you explain how this announcement will not exactly encourage such a debate about a youth crime crisis, stigmatise offenders and lead to worse outcomes?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:38): That is a rather complex question for a 1-minute response, given I did not manage to finish my answer to your substantive, so I am more than happy to continue this conversation. You are confusing a few different policies. This is in relation to bail compliance. This is not in relation to parole, which is what you have referred to. This is a trial that will be supported by some, not by everyone, and frankly that is where you find yourself in the portfolio of a justice minister. It is about balance. What I would draw your attention to is of course we have considered issues such as stigma and a badge of honour. We have considered these issues. We have considered the fact that there will be a cohort of children that it will be inappropriate to have electronic monitoring on because of traumatic backgrounds. There is a remedial aspect to monitoring children on bail. If kids on bail are complying with their conditions – if they are staying home, if they are engaging in education, if they are looking for employment opportunities – they are less likely to go and reoffend and end up having their bail revoked and end up in prison. You talk about depriving liberty. This is about ensuring that we can keep them out of jail.

Ministers statements: Mirboo North storm recovery

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:40): Last weekend I experienced what Mirboo North residents call 'the magic of the Boo'. This very special Gippsland community, four weeks on from the 13 February storm and

grieving the loss of their local natural beauty, is still casting its spell. Huge pockets of soaring trees, so important to the town's identity, have been lost – lost in a way cameras never can quite capture, because how do you photograph an empty skyline? But I can report that head contractor works are well underway. A community recovery committee will design the next phase of recovery, and there are clearly very capable leaders for this task. A spontaneous volunteer group has assembled one of the most sophisticated operations I have ever seen, with spreadsheets and whiteboards to direct small clean-up works, complete with their mascot Bruce the greyhound.

Testament to their perseverance, the town is pressing ahead with the annual Mirboo North Winterfest. I can announce today that in a boost to local business a regional development grant will help ensure the Winterfest can proceed. The regional development portfolio will also invest in a new community and business resilience hub complete with reliable satellite internet, solar panels, food and medical cold storage so that in any future emergency the town is never again totally cut off from power, communication to the outside world and emergency supplies. This is a special grant from the Labor government's Tiny Towns Fund, which supports the unique character of Victoria's smallest townships, including in their most difficult times. Thank you to the community of Mirboo North for your generosity. I have absolute, enormous respect for all of you.

Tasty Plate

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:42): (475) My question is to the Minister for Disability. Tasty Plate was a much-loved community service provider in Warrnambool, providing opportunities to individuals of all abilities. The closure announcement was a devastating bolt from the blue for employees, volunteers and the whole community. Brophy Family and Youth Services must have been aware of the alleged unviability of the service for some time. Given her close links to the organisation, Minister, what representations did you receive from your Labor colleague and member for Western Victoria Ms Ermacora?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:42): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. Brophy family services are, as are all of our community service organisations, very important partners in the delivery of social services across our state, be they disability services, family services or a range of others. As I understand it, Tasty Plate was a service that was funded by the Commonwealth government. As I think is well on the record, my discussion with the Commonwealth government and their funding for important disability services within Victoria and across the country is a very live conversation at this point in time as we consider the recommendations of the NDIS review and the recommendations of the disability royal commission. The extent to which the state and the Commonwealth can continue to partner in relation to the delivery of social services and in particular disability services is a very live issue and one that is very close to my heart. Only earlier this week I was having exactly that conversation with Minister Shorten.

In relation to the specifics of your question, I have met with Brophy family services before, but the particular program that you refer to is not a state-funded program, it is a Commonwealth NDIS-funded program. From my perspective the more that the Commonwealth continues to invest in NDIS services in Victoria, the better.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:44): Minister, you did fail to answer the question, because obviously it would be of concern to everybody, and certainly that member for Western Victoria who is very closely associated with this organisation should have made representations to you regardless of whether it is Commonwealth or state funded. You failed to answer that part of the question, so I will give you the opportunity to do so now. Minister, do you also support the generous offer of a pro bono review by KordaMentha of Tasty Plate's viability to determine whether this much-loved community organisation has an ongoing future either with or without Brophy Family and Youth Services in charge?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:45): I thank Mrs McArthur again for her question, although I reject the premise of it and the insinuation. But again for the benefit of the house, Brophy family services is an important partner in the delivery of many social services. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has a relationship with Brophy family services in relation to a number of important services. Tasty Plate is not one of them. Tasty Plate was indeed a federally funded NDIS service, a service supported by the NDIS. For people who otherwise have made their decisions as to whether or not their NDIS plans will include Tasty Plate, that is a matter for the Commonwealth and the NDIS, and it is a matter for those individual participants as to whether or not they want Tasty Plate to be a part of that. I am not the minister solely responsible, with the Commonwealth responsibilities for NDIS. I suggest that perhaps that would be a matter better taken up with the Commonwealth, as indeed I am endeavouring to do on a range of disability services to ensure that Victoria continues to get its fair share of Commonwealth support for NDIS-funded services.

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, President, the supplementary question was about whether the minister would support – even advocate to the federal minister – KordaMentha and take up that offer of a pro bono viability.

The PRESIDENT: There is no point of order. That is just debate.

Clyde North fire services

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:46): (476) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, in relation to the response time to the fire at Spartan Avenue, Clyde North, you assured the house on 5 March that the first fire emergency services vehicle ‘arrived within the service delivery standards time frame’. You then repeated this assurance on 7 March. Minister, do you stand by the absolute accuracy of your answers?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:47): I thank Mrs Hermans for her question. Again, everybody acknowledges the information and great work of our emergency responders in relation to that fire, particularly the CFA, who were first on the scene, and they arrived at the scene in 7.27 minutes – 33 seconds ahead of the 8-minute benchmark. That is the advice I have received from the chief officer, so I do stand by my answer.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:47): Thank you, Minister, for your response. Minister, I actually have an extract from Triple Zero in my possession, which I can make available to the house. It discloses that the proposed time to the fire at Clyde North was in fact 8 minutes and 48 seconds. Minister, unless the response times have changed, you have misled the house and potentially have misled the house again and have changed the documents. Minister, have the response times changed, have the documents been changed or have you misled the house?

The PRESIDENT: Three questions, but pick one.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:48): The answer to all of those questions is no. CFA and Triple Zero Victoria use CAD, and obviously that is the document that you have seen, and that reports the time it takes for a crew to arrive at an incident. Firefighters manually radio in to Triple Zero Victoria to report when they have arrived on scene. Due to radio traffic at the time, acknowledgement that went to Triple Zero Victoria happened later than when the first crew arrived. The CFA Clyde tanker arrived first on scene from the nearby satellite station. FRV crews arrived later. The response from crews was well coordinated and quick, and I confirm that 7.27 minutes – so 7 minutes and 27 seconds – was the time it took for CFA to arrive, and that is below the benchmark. I congratulate them on their efforts in responding to that fire and can confirm no misleading of the house and no doctoring of documents. My information, which I am providing to you, I will confirm again and again, because that is what I have been advised.

Ministers statements: housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:49): It seems timely that there is another opportunity to talk about another housing development, the social and affordable housing being delivered and ready for new residents who either have moved in or are moving in at Tarakan Street in Heidelberg West. It was a joy to head along to this development to celebrate the completion of these bright, modern, energy-efficient and connected homes. This is about making sure that we are providing homes that are fit for purpose, that meet current contemporary design standards and that have the relevant level of compliance with the way in which housing is configured and the way in which heating, cooling, cross-ventilation, energy efficiency and accessibility are featured in their designs. It is also one of those projects which is featured in our local energy network. This is a nation-leading initiative that supplies electricity and hot water using 100 per cent renewable energy. It can save a social housing renter around \$400 a year through onsite solar and renewable energy from the grid.

I cannot begin to tell you how grateful I was to talk to local resident Ellie, who is a political refugee from Iran who calls Tarakan Street her home. She said, ‘It’s a dream that I can’t believe is mine.’ Ellie’s gorgeous new home is another example of why we are doing this work. It is people like Ellie who drive the efforts to make sure that we are bringing new social housing online across the state as part of a record investment of billions of dollars to make sure that people have the homes that they deserve. These homes are made by people who live and work in their local communities. We have partnered with Uniting, and we are making sure that Banyule City Council is part of this work. We are on track to deliver 16,000 homes and create 40,000 jobs. This is what we are building.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:51): I thank Minister Symes –

Jaclyn Symes: Mr Limbrick.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, the substantive question. I think he might have been right when he said he might not ask the supplementary. I know you gave a commitment that if you can get him extra information on his supplementary you will, but it is outside the standing orders.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (758) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Ageing Ingrid Stitt. Aged care is an important issue for my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. I note that the minutes recently announced that the multistorey Kingston Centre aged care facility has officially topped out. This significant milestone brings the project one step closer to being completed and open to provide residents with the unique and specialist care that they need. The \$139.6 million Kingston Centre aged care development will provide 150 single bedrooms with private ensuites, open-area views and natural light. These will be grouped into small households with kitchen and dining area features to support complex care needs and mobility, including for those living with dementia. Minister, what benefits will the Kingston Centre residential aged care facility provide to older constituents of mine in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (759) My question is to the Minister for Police. Minister, in February I asked in this Parliament what safety assurances could be given to the community with the recent announcement that Victoria Police were being forced to cut down station opening hours in the evenings and in the so-called quieter periods at 43 police stations, of which seven are in my electorate in the south-east. The response was that the community can be assured that police will be where they are most needed when they are most needed and that this would

be with a 24-hour police response. Minister, can you explain why, then, when one of my staff called a police station in my electorate at 4:34 pm on 14 March 2024 the phone was not answered – and in fact the phone rang out. Can you also, if this was due to the cut-downs, tell my constituents, my staff and me how long this cut-down in hours is going to last for, because crime – *(Time expired)*

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (760) My question today is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The Brickworks site in Box Hill is a key greenfield location in my region, and it is currently earmarked for development under the control of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. It is my understanding that there is potential for a housing development to be built at this location, so I would like to ask the minister to confirm: under the plans for the Suburban Rail Loop will housing be built on this site and, if so, will it be public or community housing?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:54): (761) My question is to the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Can the minister please outline how the government is supporting the important role neighbourhood houses play in Southern Metropolitan? Recently I visited the Cheltenham Community Centre, a not-for-profit organisation that has provided community services, learning opportunities and resources for nearly 40 years, since its founding in 1986. More than 1200 people access the centre each week and participate in a variety of programs, including adult education, some subsidised child care, some mums and tots programs, health and wellness. The Cheltenham Community Centre is also one of the largest community providers of the adult migrant English program. I had a wonderful chat on my visit with one of the adult English classes. I want to thank Arna, the manager of the centre, and Keir, the CEO of Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, who took the time to show me around their facilities and discuss the important role that neighbourhood houses play within our local community.

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (762) My constituency question is for the Minister for Agriculture. In June this government will disband VicForests, and highly competent and loyal VicForests staff in my Eastern Victoria electorate will be left to find new employment if they cannot transition to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. On their way out the door my constituents are again being abandoned by this Labor government as it fails to defend staff from wilderness groups who make unsubstantiated, false and malicious claims. With a 96 per cent compliance finding from an independent audit, no matter how high the bar, qualified scientists and staff have completed comprehensive surveys and biodiversity assessments prior to the commencement of any timber harvesting. Minister, will you confirm and endorse my VicForests constituents for their professionalism, integrity and application, and publicly acknowledge their service to biodiversity, conservation, forest health and sustainably managed industry in their VicForests capacity?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:57): (763) My question is for the Minister for Housing and concerns a constituent of mine, Roza. I have written to the minister recently to inquire about Roza's application for transfer. She is a public housing tenant, and she has a son Akmel who lives with multiple disabilities. Akmel has a physical disability, an autism spectrum diagnosis and difficulty breathing and a condition that is required to be managed in relation to that which is overseen by the children's hospital. Roza applied for and was approved for a public housing transfer in 2019. Their house currently is inaccessible for Akmel without support. He requires full assistance because they have to navigate multiple flights of stairs each day to get into and out of their house. My question, Minister, is: when will new housing be provided as a result of that housing transfer?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:58): (764) Holy Ramadan is upon us, an important time for reflection, family and faith for the many thousands of Muslims that call Victoria home. Before Ramadan, imams and mosque leaders around the state graciously opened their doors for the annual open day to foster dialogue, understanding and a stronger sense of community. I had the absolute pleasure to be hosted by the Albanian Australian Islamic community at their mosque, the oldest in Melbourne, in Carlton North by Imam Perparim Sulaj. This Ramadan, however, is shaded by overseas loss and tragedy, and for so many in the Northern Metropolitan Region it is also a month of grief and grieving. I say we must take some time to wrap ourselves around and support our Muslim brothers and sisters through what is a very, very difficult time. I ask the Minister for Multicultural Affairs: what is the Allan Labor government doing to support the Muslim community experiencing distress in Northern Metropolitan Region?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:59): (765) This week a parent from Gippsland called me to express her concern about her son and his education. Her son is becoming more and more frustrated because he is struggling with school, and he does not always have a teacher there. When there is a teacher there, he describes the classroom as stressful. He is worried that he is getting more and more behind, and he does not know how he will catch up. His mother is getting worried about the effect it is having on his mental health. My question is for the Minister for Education: what actions are being taken to address the teacher shortage in Gippsland?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (766) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. My constituent is an elderly resident of Cheltenham. During the recent heatwave they were forced to use their air conditioner for most of the day and well into the evening to stay cool. Unfortunately, my constituent, like many others, is struggling with the ever-increasing cost of living, including the price of electricity. They are worried that their next power bill will be more than they can afford, but they cannot go without something as simple as air conditioning, especially during heatwaves. My constituent asks: what is the minister doing to ensure that the cost of electricity in Victoria is as low as it can be so that their power bill does not continue to increase?

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:03 pm.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:03): (767) My constituency question is for the Minister for Emergency Services and concerns a constituent suffering the ongoing COVID-19 vaccine mandate. Fire Rescue Victoria is the only fire service in Australia still enforcing mandatory vaccination. Their stubbornness is mystifying. Why are they such an outlier? It makes no medical sense. The last mandated dose was March 2022. It cannot be effective now. Nor does it apply to volunteers, who with the same vaccine status can work. The mandate is also contrary to Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation recommendations and ignores FRV's suppressed risk assessment, only obtained through FOI. The Queensland Supreme Court concluded that a similar mandate contradicted human rights legislation, recognising a person's right not to be subject to medical treatment without full, free and informed consent. Given this ruling and the fact that –
(Time expired)

Northern Metropolitan Region

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (14:04): (768) My constituency question is to the Premier. The Hume for Palestine group has been organising community pickets at Heat Treatment Australia in Campbellfield. I commend them for their ongoing efforts to halt the production of parts used in the F-35 bomber plane, which is deployed extensively by Israeli defence forces. This aircraft

is being used to indiscriminately bomb large swathes of Gaza. It is directly responsible for the deaths of thousands of Palestinian people, and its production is made possible by manufacturing happening right here in Victoria, at HTA in my electorate. In the Netherlands it is now illegal to supply F-35 parts to Israel as they are being used in 'serious violations of international humanitarian law'. If Victoria continues to allow the production of these parts, then aren't we complicit in these violations too? The community is fighting to stop the production of F-35 parts, and the government must do their part. Premier, what are you doing to ensure HTA and similar manufacturing companies are obliged to adhere to morally ethical guidelines?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:05): (769) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. When will the Hume Freeway–Watson Street diamond interchange upgrade commence, and what is the breakdown of funding over the forward estimates of the budget? In 2019 the previous federal Liberal government pledged \$50 million towards this project, a project which passed the recent Commonwealth infrastructure review. In 2022 state Labor announced an election commitment of \$130 million, giving the impression that this was in addition to federal funding. The member for McEwen even posted on Facebook that it was. But post the election it was revealed that it includes the feds' \$50 million. During the election the now Premier said that this project was a priority for Labor, but they are dragging their feet and no work has commenced. There was no line item in the May 2023 state budget; the funding is hidden somewhere in a roads blitz package. Residents of Yan Yean are desperate for this project to get started so that the serious traffic congestion – (*Time expired*)

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:07): (770) My question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. It is the government's plan to use property speculation to build upon existing open areas in the Box Hill area of my electorate, and their concurrent plan is to increase the population of Box Hill by a staggering 47 per cent. To paraphrase the Whitehorse council, the definition of 'open spaces' typically includes parks, gardens and reserves. My constituents are rightly concerned that they will have less open space after this project. My question to the minister is: will you guarantee the ratio of population to open space is maintained and the families of Box Hill will not have any less open space per person than they do now as a result of the SRL build and population plan?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (14:07): (771) My question is for the Minister for Police. My constituents' businesses in Werribee are extremely concerned over the recent rise in break-ins at businesses in Werribee. Can the minister outline to business owners in Werribee what is being done to ensure that businesses feel safe opening their doors? Over the long weekend there were multiple break-ins and attempted break-ins near my electorate office in Watton Street, Werribee. On Sunday Orange Door, a social services organisation, was broken into between 7:15 and 7:18. On Monday Notorious cafe was broken into at 4 am. There was also another attempt at a local hairdressers. That is three break-ins in three days, but these break-ins are just the tip of the iceberg, with the number of crimes rising in Victoria and the west being the worst hit area in the state. Can the minister please outline the action being implemented to address the increase in crime in the west to ensure that businesses feel safe to operate?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (14:08): (772) My question is to the minister for transport on behalf of constituents who are fed up with the ongoing disruptions on our train lines. Commuters are increasingly frustrated with train cancellations and delays, swapping to buses and industrial action on the Bendigo line. Recent figures show Bendigo trains are cancelled more often than most other regional lines. Ongoing industrial action is causing chaos for commuters. People rely on the train to

get to work or medical appointments, go to school or visit Bendigo as tourists. More disruption was planned for this Friday, which has since been cancelled. It is hard for commuters to keep track and change plans. The reduction in fares has also seen increased usage across the regional network, resulting in overcrowding and uncomfortable services on trains and coaches. The disruption has been going on for months, and I ask the state government to explain what is being done to manage this situation and to come to an agreement to get our regional train services back on track.

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, Acting President, I would ask that you ask the President to review the answer that the Minister for Disability gave me this morning, because she did not answer the question. I would like that reviewed with a view to her actually answering the question as asked.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I will pass that on.

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Reference

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (14:10): I am pleased to move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the government's housing statement outlines an intention to demolish and redevelop Melbourne's 44 public housing high-rise buildings by 2051, including a plan to build a majority of private homes on these publicly owned sites;
- (2) requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report by December 2025 on:
 - (a) the rationale and cost modelling for the decision to demolish and redevelop the 44 high-rise public housing buildings and associated sites ('the plan'), including alternatives to demolition, such as refurbishment and renovation;
 - (b) the impact of the plan, including the compulsory relocation and displacement of public housing residents on the future net availability of public community housing and the existing decanting plans and the department estimates on the number of people who will permanently leave the area being developed;
 - (c) the findings and adequacy of consultations with:
 - (i) public housing tower residents and their representatives;
 - (ii) relevant local stakeholders, such as health, community and education service providers, residents and councils;
 - (iii) state and federal government departments and agencies;
 - (d) the efficacy of the proposed financial, legal and project delivery models (including the ground lease model) to be used for the plan, versus alternative models to improve and increase the number of public and community homes on the sites in question and in Victoria;
 - (e) building standards for the developments, including whether there will be the same standards for public, community and private housing;
 - (f) how different development and ownership models will be integrated within each site to enhance community integration and achieve a diversity of tenants;
 - (g) the likely impacts of the plan on:
 - (i) the number of bedrooms currently at each location versus the proposed number of new bedrooms per site;
 - (ii) the number of public and community housing homes at each location and how remaining public land will be used;
 - (iii) the Victorian Housing Register and homelessness while the plan is being delivered;
 - (iv) the future of public housing in Victoria; and
 - (h) any other related matters.

The motion calls for an inquiry into what is happening with public housing in Victoria and particularly the government's recent announcement on public housing towers. I was proud to join with public housing residents and advocates this morning at Parliament, all united in their support for us to pass this motion for a parliamentary inquiry today to investigate Labor's plans for public housing in Victoria. Labor has been walking away from public housing for years, and its latest plan could be the nail in the coffin. We are urging this Parliament to not let that happen. We are urging everyone to support this inquiry.

The Victorian Labor government's housing statement released late last year notifies the public that it will demolish all 44 public housing towers in Victoria. This significant decision was made with no consultation of residents, the broader community or even the government's own housing authority, Homes Victoria. The government has since failed to release any information about whether feasibility investigations were done to scope out alternative options to demolition, such as renovation or refurbishment. Residents still do not have much information about their futures, and Homes Victoria have been left scrambling to legitimise this negligently undercooked plan.

The Greens have spent months doorknocking residents in these public housing towers because we wanted to understand how residents are feeling about this sudden announcement and what they actually want. Many people we have spoken to had not heard a word from the government about the fate of their homes and their communities. They were shocked to hear it from us. Those who did know about it felt powerless. They expressed that they had no choice but to leave and that they had been offered houses in suburbs far from the inner city where the public transport is limited, schools are limited and social services are scarce. They are worried that they will lose the communities they have built over many years. This was particularly a concern for those who are new migrants or refugees, for whom community is everything. This might be their first stable place they have ever had in their lives.

Some residents have already signed paperwork to move away. Several people said they felt pressured to sign these documents. They did not have interpreters or lawyers to help them understand their rights or what they were signing on to. Others said they had been offered short-term three- to five-year contracts in community housing where rents are higher and the renewal of tenancy is not guaranteed. We are hearing that many residents are deeply dissatisfied with these offers because they know their rights are stronger in public housing than in community housing. Some have rejected these offers, but others felt they had to accept them for fear of becoming homeless. Housing agencies are reporting that they are now having to support clients with a form of post-traumatic stress disorder because the announcement has hurtled many back to the feelings of despair that they experienced when they were homeless. Many public housing residents experienced homelessness before they accessed public housing, and they are petrified they will face that again. The government can do as much PR as they like, but the reality is there are not enough homes to move these 10,000 people to. You – Labor – have traumatised people with this announcement.

We have brought this motion for an inquiry into the demolition of the towers because we are deeply concerned about the Labor government's lack of consultation, communication and planning. We bring this motion to Parliament on behalf of residents so they can finally get some answers and we can get better outcomes for residents. My colleagues and I have consistently risen in this chamber to get answers from this government about the details of its plan ever since it was announced over six months ago. We have only come up against brick walls, obfuscation, evasiveness, petty insults and outright contempt. This is what we have been met with when we have tried to get more information on behalf of residents. The government is hiding behind commercial in confidence to avoid accountability to its constituents and to this Parliament.

It is becoming clearer and clearer with each day passing that this government is avoiding questions because it simply does not have the answers due to a lack of planning for this policy. A project of this magnitude, a 28-year shape-changing project for Victoria, requires scrutiny. It is commensurate to the city-shaping projects that we have seen already embarked upon by this government, many of them

running into significant hurdles, especially when it is hugely unpopular with the people it will impact the most. We think enough is enough. This policy is overseeing the wholesale destruction of public housing across Victoria. It will destabilise tens of thousands of people. It will tear apart strong communities, and it will change the diversity and the very fabric of the areas it affects. Residents in the community want answers. This inquiry has to happen if we are to hold this government to account, get answers and ultimately, and most importantly, get better outcomes for residents.

Members will see that the terms of reference being proposed for the inquiry are fulsome. This is necessary to combat the government's reticence to inform the public of its plans. The devil is in the details, as they say, and we have seen this government hide behind vague policies before. In the public housing renewal program, the predecessor to this policy proposal, the government handed over 11 inner-city public housing sites to private developers at well below market rate to build predominantly private housing. The government justified this decision by claiming that 30 per cent of the units would be social housing, a 10 per cent uplift, and this would represent an uplift in the amount of housing available for people on the housing register across the sites. Upon further inquiry we saw that despite there being more community housing units overall, there would actually be fewer bedrooms, so in reality there will be fewer social housing tenants and less public housing – no public housing, actually – on these sites than there were before.

These are the deceptive tactics being used by this government to facilitate the wholesale privatisation of our state's public housing stock and its outsourcing. The terms of reference have been drafted to extract details so that government cannot continue to hide behind its vague housing statement. They reflect the questions that residents have been asking, to which they have received no responses. The government must answer these questions so that people are not left in the dark about the security of their homes and the future of their community and so that we get a stronger outcome.

We hold deeper concerns about the impact that destroying these towers will have. Not only will it cause enormous distress to the residents who are displaced but we see this policy as the harbinger of the end of public housing as we know it in this state and potentially across this country. We are seeing time and time again that where the government demolishes public housing, private property developers are the main beneficiaries. The government's public housing renewal and ground lease model programs were spruiked as private-public partnership models for increasing Victoria's housing stock. In reality these models are just a handover of valuable public land to private developers, with little or no public housing being built and the government's responsibility for affordable housing being outsourced to non-government providers – not to mention that we are forgoing huge swathes of land that could be used to build more housing. When you consider the skyrocketing waiting list of over 120,000 people and the 30,000 people on any given night in Victoria experiencing homelessness, why are we giving away public land that we could build public housing on?

An example of this is the Barak Beacon public housing estate in Port Melbourne. Imagine right before Christmas being doorknocked by a stranger from the department telling you that you had to leave your home of 25 years. This is what happened to Margaret Kelly and her neighbours. An entire community was put through this deeply distressing situation just so that private developers could have access to waterfront views. We have seen the proposed plans for Barak Beacon. You will find 278 new private homes and only 130 community homes; not a single public home will be built at this site.

Other public housing sites lay empty – public homes with no residents and vacant plots with no construction – for years at a time, sometimes upwards of six to seven years since demolition. For example, the Bell Bardia public housing estate in Heidelberg West, which hosted public housing on public land, has been given to private developers for development. In 2017 they promised 430 new houses and a right of return to residents. Almost eight years later not a single house has been built. That lot lies empty, as do the red-brick public housing flats in Carlton, which have sat unoccupied and derelict for years. It has recently been announced that these flats will be rebuilt as public housing, which we welcome and which is a huge relief, but the only reason this will be possible is federal government funding – money which was won by the Greens during negotiations for the Housing

Australia Future Fund. Beyond this the government has not made a promise for even a single public home for any of the other tower development sites – not a single public home – all this in the middle of an escalating housing crisis, while the housing waitlist continues to grow. Why has nothing been built on these lots for years? Because, in some cases, developers are sitting on the land waiting for it to go up in value, because developers are trying to weasel their way out of building social and affordable housing wherever they can and because this program has been grossly mismanaged by government.

We are also seeing examples of promises broken around the number of social and affordable homes being delivered. At the Abbotsford Street public housing site in North Melbourne the government and a private developer, MAB, cancelled contracts for affordable housing. In place of the cancelled contracts government and MAB are now offering people options to buy other housing at market rates – higher prices – and walking back on the promise of delivering any affordable private housing at the North Melbourne site. When asked why these contracts were cancelled, the government and MAB only cited increased construction costs. People who were promised affordable housing are now left without hope of a new home, as they cannot afford to buy at a market rate. The government promised housing and a diversity of dwellings. They said, ‘Let’s knock this public housing down. We’re going to get dwelling diversity.’ That is what they said. People cannot move in there now. When broken promises abound, how can we trust this Labor government to deliver on the housing it has promised in place of the 44 towers?

Even where affordable and social housing is being built, we are hearing of major issues from tenants. At a new affordable housing build in Dunlop Avenue, Ascot Vale, a resident is dealing with a plethora of problems, including mould growth, dampness, rust puddles, cracks in the roof and tap water that may be unsafe to drink. The resident’s housing provider has ignored every request for these issues to be rectified, and Homes Victoria have made thinly veiled threats about the resident’s housing tenure. This has left her with no choice but to move to an Airbnb and pursue the matter at VCAT, creating a huge financial burden and undue stress for Grace, who lives with a disability. The resident reports that her neighbours are facing similar issues but are too afraid to raise the matter with their housing providers for fear of eviction.

This is why we are also asking for the inquiry to look at consistent and high building standards for all residents. When this is the fate befalling tenants at public housing redevelopment sites already, how can the public and the Parliament have any confidence in the government to deliver what it is promising for these public housing tower sites across 28 years? These stories are the canary in the coal mine. Victorians who are vulnerable or on low incomes are already facing the consequences of this government’s pernicious privatisation agenda. The plan to demolish Victoria’s 44 public housing towers must be scrutinised. The government has not put forward an iota of evidence showing that these towers cannot be renovated or refurbished. Ultimately the government must not abdicate its responsibility to provide public housing in the middle of the housing crisis. At times like these we need more public housing, not less.

We are hearing now that the government is speeding up its tender process for demolition contracts so that it can evict residents from towers imminently. They are doing this despite not having any discernible plans for homes on these sites. Has any contract been signed with a developer? ‘No, we are going to demolish the homes first and get the residents out – those pesky residents who can organise together and fight back against the government. Well, let’s destroy that community.’ We see this for what it is because we have seen it before. This is exactly what happened to residents at Walker Street in Northcote. Seven years later, there is not a single home on that site, but they said, ‘Sorry, we have got to demolish immediately. Get out.’ Residents were evicted from their homes in 2019, and not a single home has been built on that site. The Labor government wants to evict tenants as quickly as possible so they face the least possible resistance to this abysmal plan. This tactic is truly reprehensible. The government wants residents to go quietly, and this is what they expect to happen.

Residents in public housing are often vulnerable, from marginalised communities, or speak English as a second or third or fourth language. But residents are fighting back. They are organising, they are speaking up and they are suing this government for the right to stay in their homes. We in this chamber must do what we can to help. This inquiry is about creating accountability and getting some real answers and better outcomes for residents. We are going to hear a lot from this government this afternoon about why we should not have this inquiry. 'It's just going to slow us down,' they will say. If they have done the work, it will not slow them down. But what we fear, and what we know, is that they have not done the work, because after six months of questioning not a single document has been furnished to us that justifies this reprehensible plan.

It is a 28-year program. A six- to 12-month parliamentary inquiry will not slow that down. In fact it only has the chance of improving the outcomes. We saw this happen in 2017 and 2018 when we had the first parliamentary inquiry into the original iteration of the public housing renewal program. The government was finally under pressure because once again they had put a plan before us without any justification or rationale, and they were forced to deliver better outcomes for residents and walk back some of the worst parts of the plan they put on the table. We know parliamentary inquiries are an important and critical tool of this Parliament and this chamber, and we must exercise that power when we have an opportunity.

The government has had more than six months to furnish what they are suddenly promising today to everyone. 'Oh, we'll consult. We'll give you documents.' Suddenly today is the day. Not last week, not two months ago – today, suddenly, they have had a turnabout: 'We can do everything. You don't need to have this inquiry. We're going to do everything. We're going to talk to residents.' Finally, after six months. That is what they are promising people in this chamber today. How can you believe them? Isn't it convenient that today they have had a change of heart? Suddenly it is going to be open and transparent. But how can we trust them when they have held this Parliament in contempt for the last six months, they have held Victoria in contempt for the last six months and, most critically and unforgivably, they have held public housing residents in contempt? We have spoken to hundreds of residents who are distraught. None of the PR about 'Oh, everyone is happy. They've signed their documents' is going to work with us, because we have talked to them directly, and we encourage you to do the same.

Why is this inquiry important today, before we take a break for nearly two months before we come back into this chamber? The government is working very hard to get some delay and buy themselves more time. Well, they have had six months – isn't that enough time? It is because the government is trying to issue demolition contracts with not a single contract signed with a developer. They are trying to break up those communities, flatten the ground and hold those sites for however many years – if Walker estate is anything to go by, five, six, seven years, and then we add the others. Is that what we are going to accept in this Parliament: a government knocking down housing that people are living in in the midst of one of the worst housing crises we have ever experienced and leaving that land vacant, with nothing, while people sleep rough, while people are told by housing providers, 'We can only give you a tent or a sleeping bag. We're really sorry. There's not enough homes'? When there is a big event in town like a Taylor Swift concert, all the motels and hotels get booked up and we are hearing from people about how more people are homeless during that time because our city cannot cope. Is that what we are going to agree to, or is this Parliament going to do its job today and say, 'No, we're going to do our job and we're going to get better outcomes for residents'?

Every parliamentary inquiry that we have had in this place has improved outcomes for the community. That is why we have this lever. That is why we have this power. It will apply pressure from day one. Residents will know finally they will be able to tell their story to someone and they will be able to tell their stories to decision-makers who can make a difference. We can make a difference for those residents. You and I know we are having those residents walk through our doors – so many people who are experiencing distress because they cannot live in their homes because the government will not fix their ailing homes at times because maintenance is so backlogged, or people who are

experiencing homelessness because they do not know where else to go. They have nowhere else to go and then come to an MP's office, because where else do they turn when even housing services cannot find a home anymore for them and their kids? I know I have heard from this chamber and the other chamber too that our MPs are hearing these stories more and more every day. It is now our responsibility to do something about it.

Do not fall for the tactic the government is going to use today: 'Oh, it's going to delay things.' No, it is not going to delay things, it is going to improve things. The last time we had a parliamentary inquiry suddenly the government came with answers. They talked to residents; we started getting outcomes from day one. We got that for the waste and recycling inquiry too, and I can name so many more. It is an important tool. We have it at our disposal today. Let us use it and not let them get off the hook for what they have been trying to do to us for six months, which is to deny, to delay, to avoid. This is our opportunity to get something constructive happening, starting now. These residents need this action from us today. If we are thinking about these residents who are at the coalface of this government's decision, please keep them at the heart of everything you do today, because they need some relief. It is the reason there is a class action. There are extraordinary things happening in this community because people are distraught about what the government is putting on the table. Let us take up that responsibility and do our job – no delay; it should start today.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:28): I rise to speak on the motion put before us today by Dr Ratnam. I am given pause to reflect on a contribution I made in this chamber late last year following the Legal and Social Issues Committee's previous inquiry into the rental and housing crisis in Victoria. I will touch back on that particular inquiry in a moment, but I am given pause to reflect because I remarked in that contribution that I had always, growing up, found the Greens to be above all rational and principled. With this particular issue, it was the first time that I could seriously look at myself and say that they are actually defying logic. They are defying the evidence that is before them, and they are wilfully pursuing something that I could only presume they know to be illogical. I am given pause to think about that again today because we have heard from Dr Ratnam quite passionately about the need for information. I know that Minister Shing has been available to all members of this place and all members of the other place to give briefings on this subject at any time – from the very get-go Minister Shing has made herself available. The Greens decided not to take that up, to walk out of the room, as it were. If they are not going to take that up, that is on them. But that does not give them the right to then turn around in this place and say, 'You've not actually given us a fair crack.'

If you are going to engage on this, I actually ask you to seriously engage on it. I know Minister Shing has made herself available throughout from the start on this – from when we first announced that these 44 ageing, increasingly uninhabitable towers are going to be fully replaced and redeveloped to provide thousands more social homes in the process and thousands more homes still in total. That offer has been available to all members of this place, including Dr Ratnam, including all the members of the Greens and including what I would refer to as the Greens' self-appointed housing spokesman Mr McGowan. I note that he has not taken up the opportunity of a briefing either, and I am surprised to not see him in the chamber today, to be honest, because I know how passionate he is about this subject.

Evan Mulholland: He's on the list.

Michael GALEA: Well, again, I would ask Mr Mulholland: if he is on the list to speak, why has he not even bothered to seek advice from Minister Shing at any point? If he has got that interest in the issue, he should have genuinely engaged in it. It makes me wonder whether this is just a cynical political ploy to attract votes. Perhaps you are worried about the Victorian Socialists edging into your territory. That is the only conclusion I can make, because of the absolute evidence that you are completely ignoring.

I will come back to a few things, but we know that our older public housing high-rise buildings are coming to the end of their life. It is no longer feasible or cost-effective to continue to repair these buildings to the standards that the renters actually deserve. We want to provide high-quality housing to all Victorians. I do not want to be standing here and saying that if you are in public housing, you deserve a lesser standard than anyone else. That is unacceptable. If you are in public housing, you deserve the exact same standards. You deserve the best standards of accessibility, of safety – of all things. You deserve for your buildings not to have sewage flood them whenever there is a big rain event. You deserve not to have your lifts thrown out of action, so you do not have to climb 20 or more flights of stairs on a regular basis. You deserve to be able to access these apartments if you are in a wheelchair. This should not be a controversial thing.

I keep coming back to this: what this policy is already doing is delivering modern, accessible, better quality apartments and better quality social housing for people that need it the most, and that is something that we should support. I know and I will acknowledge that the Greens have a particular passion on this issue, but that makes it all the more confounding to me as to why you would not support this. It really does. These towers were built using a unique concrete construction method, with structural internal walls and very low ceiling heights. This restricts the alterations. You cannot just renovate and change a ceiling height. In a similar situation, it is very difficult to make the walls, doorways, corridors, lifts and stairwells comply with current standards.

There have been a number of programs over the past 20 years to upgrade these towers to provide them with the best services and facilities possible, but it is not possible to make them what they need to be. In fact if we were to do nothing and if we were to spend the next 20 years just letting these towers be as they are, it would cost \$2.3 billion – just to keep them at the level that they are. That is before you can even look at doing anything that is going to improve them, and as I say, how do you actually improve a ceiling height on a multistorey building? How do you do all of these things? It is going to be so costly.

I know that in the Legal and Social Issues Committee when we did have a detailed discussion in a hearing on this issue we heard from Mr Simon Newport from Homes Victoria. It was put to him by one of the Greens members – it may have even been you, Mr Puglielli – ‘Why don’t you just renovate the towers?’ He explained in great detail as to why it simply is not possible. But more so, he said that if you were to renovate them to anything close to the standard that we would expect, whatever the cost, you would still have to temporarily relocate people out of those buildings to do it. So the very thing which you say is the issue – and you are saying ‘It’s fine, just renovate them’ – would actually have the exact same impact as what you are accusing us of doing. I genuinely have tried to look at it from a different perspective, and I keep coming back to this: if you think that all Victorians deserve the quality of housing that we should all be entitled to, then I do not see why you would so vigorously oppose the redevelopment of these 44 towers.

I heard Dr Ratnam’s commentary that we would accuse her of trying to slow it down and that a parliamentary committee would provide better oversight, but that is not what this is about. This is about a political campaign and using the resources of the Parliament to continue to promote and grandstand her campaign in the face of all evidence. I can well imagine, as a member of this committee myself, we are going to go through the exact same thing that we went through last year – sure, it will be in more detail as there will be more days devoted to this, absolutely. But we are going to get the exact same answers and the exact same issues. Having a parliamentary committee inquiry is not going to make it easier to increase the ceiling heights and to remove all these fire and other hazards that are in these buildings. It is not going to change that. It is not going to change the facts. All it is going to do is give a platform to grandstand and, as I say, to run a campaign. Whether it is running and trying to stop the Victorian Socialists from encroaching on your turf or whether it is something else, I do not know. I really, really would love to believe there is still a genuine reason behind this because I just cannot see any logical rationale for supporting this particular campaign that is being run by the Greens. Accordingly I cannot see any rationale to support the inquiry that is before us today.

A huge amount of work has been undertaken, and I know that Minister Shing has been earnestly trying to engage with colleagues across the chamber on this issue and other aspects of the housing statement, as has Minister Kilkeny from the other place. I know she will have some remarks to make shortly about that as well, because this is a government that genuinely is trying to make this situation better for people who are in public housing. Public and social housing is an important part of the welfare net, the social support that we provide to vulnerable Victorians. As I say, just because you are in it does not mean that you should be treated worse than anyone else in this state. I find that offensive.

There has already been significant investment into this space, as I touched on before, by the state government. We know it is part of a broader package, and that is where the housing statement comes in. That is why we also must have sensible discussions about how we grow our city. We cannot continue to have the vast bulk of our new homes being built in the outer suburbs. We must be more sensible than that. We must be more sensible than the Greens-led Yarra City Council, which, as reported in the *Age* just this morning, has opposed a six-storey development on a tramline in Fitzroy. That is outrageous. I am all for appropriate and sensible development, and I am sure in this case my colleague Mr Mulholland will agree with me, but that is outrageous. I commend the actions of YIMBY Melbourne, a group I have had the pleasure of getting to know over the past few months, in challenging that and in challenging the entitlement that says, 'I've got mine; I've got my services nearby. Stuff anyone else having them.'

I could continue talking about this for quite some time, but for the reasons I have outlined, I do not commend this motion to the house.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:38): It is a delight to speak on this motion moved by Dr Ratnam that this house:

- (1) notes the government's housing statement outlines an intention to demolish and redevelop Melbourne's 44 public housing high-rise buildings by 2051, including a plan to build a majority of private homes on these publicly owned sites;
- (2) requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report by December 2025 on:
 - (a) the rationale and cost modelling for the decision to demolish and redevelop the 44 high-rise public housing buildings and associated sites ... including alternatives to demolition, such as refurbishment and renovation;
 - (b) the impact of the plan, including the compulsory relocation and displacement of public housing residents on the future net availability of public community housing and the existing decanting plans and the department estimates on the number of people who will permanently leave the area being developed;
 - (c) the findings and adequacy of consultations with:
 - (i) public housing tower residents and their representatives;
 - (ii) relevant local stakeholders, such as health, community and education service providers, residents and councils;
 - (iii) state ... government departments and agencies;
 - (d) the efficacy of the proposed financial, legal and project delivery models (including the ground lease model) to be used for the plan, versus alternative models to improve and increase the number of public and community homes on the sites in question and in Victoria;
 - (e) building standards for the developments, including whether there will be the same standards for public, community and private housing;
 - (f) how different development and ownership models will be integrated within each site to enhance community integration and achieve a diversity of tenants;
 - (g) the likely impacts of the plan on:
 - (i) the number of bedrooms currently at each location versus the proposed number of new bedrooms per site;

- (ii) the number of public and community housing homes at each location and how remaining public land will be used;
- (iii) the Victorian Housing Register and homelessness while the plan is being delivered;
- (iv) the future of public housing in Victoria; and
- (h) any other related matters.

I was listening intently to both Mr Galea and Dr Ratnam. It is important to remember the promises that were made as part of the government's Big Housing Build. Through government incompetence – and we have seen government incompetence on display today through the Auditor-General's report that just dropped, so I think it is important to look into these things – we have seen a mismanagement of a huge spend. Nearly \$4 billion has been spent so far on the Big Housing Build, and the total number of new homes promised to Victorians was to be in excess of 12,000. During his last Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing the then minister Richard Wynne declared that the build was going so well it would likely be 15,000 homes. That has not really eventuated at all. Let us look at some of the facts in this case. The priority housing waitlist in June 2018 was 45,509 families – September 2023, 60,708 families, an increase of 15,199 families. There has been an increase of 3040 families per year since 2018. As of December 2023, wait times for a home are at record highs. It is an absolute mess.

We have got I think a lack of transparency in regard to the government's plans. For example, in my electorate and Dr Ratnam's electorate in the North Melbourne tower there is actually a language school at the bottom who are facing an enormous amount of uncertainty as to what will happen. I have been contacted by many constituents who are very concerned about the government's plans, and I found it quite amusing that the government sought to assure consultation in the lead-up to this motion. As often happens with many motions that come from non-government members in the upper house, the government scurries around trying in any way to stop non-government members working together to find answers. We have not received answers, yet we are meant to believe we are going to receive answers and get consultation because we moved this motion. I think it is much better to use the tools of the Parliament that we have available to us, one of which is that of parliamentary inquiry, to get the answers ourselves, because clearly the government cannot be trusted. Even the Auditor-General pointed out today that the government could not be trusted on their ridiculous figures of \$6.9 billion for the Commonwealth Games, which they said was unfounded. But these are the consequences that we get really. When the government torches \$600 million on the Commonwealth Games, that means less money for public housing in my electorate. It is sheer incompetence that we are seeing.

I will just go through a couple of other things. I want to go through total bedrooms, because the inquiry will be looking into that as well. The total bedrooms available in 2018 was 160,348. In June 2023 the total number of bedrooms was 157,615. That is a reduction of 2733 bedrooms. At the end of 2017, close to when the government made its new commitment, there were 161,153 bedrooms. There are now 157,615 bedrooms. So a \$4 billion Big Housing Build was announced but we have gone backwards, and the number of homes has also not improved very much.

We had the promise to build 12,000 homes, and Victoria's public housing stock has increased by just 394 homes since 2018. The government launched a \$5.3 billion program in 2020. We all heard the pledge – 12,000 homes by 2024. Well, we know the government has only spent \$4 billion of that and it has only achieved 394 new homes – an incredible amount of money for not a whole lot done. The former minister – I do not think the current one would make that mistake – said they would actually go forward on that and achieve 15,000 new homes. You can check the Hansard transcript on PAEC for that one. So we are seeing announcements before elections, and the reality is different afterwards. We will be supporting this motion.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (14:48): I rise today to address an issue of significant importance to so many communities and so many families around the areas of Melbourne where public housing towers have been a feature of the landscape for decades. These towers are of enormous significance to many families and people

who have called them home, who have connected to their communities and who have based themselves, their daily activities, their passions and the milestones of their lives in and around them. These are buildings which were constructed between the 1950s and the 1970s. At the time that they were built using a very unique method of concrete construction, they complied with all of the relevant standards relating to dwelling size, ceiling height, accessibility, ventilation, natural light and broader connection to community. They also met the needs of residents as they related to use of electrical appliances and to the development and use and deployment of water and essential infrastructure services.

Times have changed, and since times have changed we see now that these towers no longer comply with the standards that apply for minimum amenity. These buildings no longer fit the standards for fire, flood, seismic activity, resistance and resilience. These towers do not have the electrical systems and circuitry in place to support larger air-conditioning units to be installed within them at large scale. These buildings without significant upgrade and maintenance through double glazing and through energy-efficiency upgrades will remain noisy, cold in winter and hot in summer. Due to the concrete construction they warm up and they stay hot during periods of persistent warm weather. In winter the air whistles through them and people live in cold environments. It is expensive to heat and to maintain a measure of comfort in these homes because we do not have the structural design in place to enable them to remain at and to meet and to comply with what we expect as minimum standards of amenity in the homes that we call our own.

Things need to change, and change is difficult. We are embarking upon the largest investment in social housing in the history of this state. It was a \$5.3 billion investment into social housing announced in 2021 that has set us on the path to not just delivering new social housing but upgrading existing stock. The average life span of social housing dwellings is about 45 years. We have reached the end of that life span for much of our stock. What we are doing is investing in maintenance, upgrades and improvements that can make sure that to the best extent possible a measure of amenity is created and sustained for people who call them home. But the towers need to be developed. As others have pointed out, we are talking about billions of dollars simply to make them habitable. But when the very DNA of these towers themselves does not enable, through electrical circuitry, through construction methodology, through a range of other issues around insulation and around the flow of air through these structures – those sorts of improvements that are at the heart of making sure that people live well – then we need to effect change.

Since the announcements as part of the housing statement were made last September, government has spoken to around 5800 households across the towers. This has occurred directly with the housing officers and through faith-based organisations, through hosting community events and pop-up stalls, doorknocking on homes to listen to feedback and answer questions and setting up a dedicated 1800 phone line connected to a three-way translation service. There have been almost 150 interpreters, who have ensured that residents could be heard in their primary languages: Arabic, Cantonese, Hakka Chinese, Mandarin, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Tigrinya, Turkish, Vietnamese – the list goes on.

Certainty is important. Discussions with renters about priority areas determined by renters based on their circumstances are important. To this end it does not depart significantly from what happens with any social housing development. This is an order of magnitude, however, that means that more people are immediately affected by this multidecade process than would otherwise occur in decentralised sites around the state. This requires an enormous measure of logistical expertise to plan and to deliver. But at the heart of this is the impact on people. The impact on people of this change is not underestimated, nor is it ignored. It requires that longstanding engagement, that longstanding commitment, not just between here and December 2025, the end point at which this inquiry seeks to stop a discussion and examination of these issues. It requires years of work to make sure that as we move from the first tranche into further work, as site-specific concerns and questions and inquiries and aspirations of residents are better understood, that we can tailor the approaches that we take in finding solutions to the problems, which are not solved by any delay to this particular project.

We know that it will be time consuming, that it will be expensive and that it will involve all sorts of enormous change and disruption to the lives of renters and to their communities. We also know that to continue on the path that we are continuing on ignores the reality that these buildings no longer afford the level of amenity and dignity and connection and standard that everybody else seeks in the places they call home. This is not easy work. Nobody for a second is underestimating that. It is also not work that has occurred under a veil of secrecy. We have seen Homes Victoria representatives and housing officers appear at a range of different public hearings, inquiries, events and discussions. I have been approached on numerous occasions by members of the crossbench and by members of the opposition in this place and in the other seeking information about the way in which this program will be delivered and the processes involved. Never once has the Leader of the Greens gotten in touch with me to ask for a briefing or for detail on this development pipeline.

What I said when I was first appointed to this portfolio to every member of the crossbench was that I was available to provide information on this because it is multidecade engagement. Other members of the crossbench have sought briefings. Other members of the crossbench have asked questions. I welcome that. I welcome the opportunity to be able to provide that information and to make sure that we can correct misinformation and disinformation. Dr Ratnam has never once – never once – sought a briefing or a breakdown of the issues now sought to be ventilated in the Parliament. It is somewhat extraordinary that the very first time that Dr Ratnam engages in this process in a wholesale way here, seeking this information in the consolidated way that is set out in this motion of inquiry, is in a public forum where in fact there is so much lost time that has occurred as a result of a –

Samantha Ratnam: On a point of order, Acting President, I just want to query how we can hold accuracy to account. There are some assertions being made that reflect on my character.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is no point of order, Dr Ratnam.

Samantha Ratnam: I believe the member –

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is no point of order.

Harriet SHING: To the Greens I would say: if you are acting for a proper purpose –

Samantha Ratnam: On a point of order, Acting President, I believe the member is reflecting on me by asserting that I have not sought briefings – that I have not brought this to her before. I have brought it multiple times through this chamber before.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I do not consider that a reflection.

Harriet SHING: I am just waiting for further points of order to waste the time that I have left available to me, but let us keep going. I continue to offer and make myself available to provide information to everyone who wants to know about it. We have dozens and hundreds of people working every single day to provide the very information that is sought through this motion. What a disappointment we do not see the Greens engaging in good faith. *(Time expired)*

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:58): I also rise to speak on this motion to form an inquiry into, among other things, the redevelopment of the 44 public housing high-rise buildings by 2051, brought forward by the Greens. I will not be supporting this motion, for a number of reasons. The first reason is I do not really take what the Greens say about housing seriously. There are so many instances of the Greens in councils and in other places that oppose housing at every opportunity. I will give you an example. Steph Hodgins-May in the campaign for Macnamara – the headline campaign was to oppose a development of housing towers.

Samantha Ratnam: Was she on council?

David LIMBRICK: No. She was a candidate, running to say, ‘I will stop housing being built.’ That was the platform that they were running on. This is the campaign poster that they were using on social media.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Order!

David LIMBRICK: Thank you. I do not buy it. Secondly, as a great economist once said, you must judge policy not by its intention but by its consequences. Many of the things proposed in this place by the Greens, like rental caps – again we are talking about price controls – could result in disastrous consequences. Whether or not the Greens believe that these consequences will happen is like believing whether or not gravity exists. This just defies the laws of economics.

On another matter, when we are talking about housing and human rights, firstly, I would state that in the charter of human rights in Victoria – although I have got many problems with the charter in Victoria; I have spoken about the charter many times and I am sure the members of the government are sick of hearing me talk about the charter – one of the things that the charter does get right is it focuses on negative rights, so it focuses on restrictions on what the government can do rather than things that the government should be compelled to do, which is a very wise thing which was also taken into account in the American constitution and the American bill of rights.

But in the last term of Parliament I seem to recall there were some very big issues around human rights and the housing towers. In fact during one of the lockdowns, this abysmal and dark episode in Victoria’s history, one that was confirmed by the Ombudsman as a gross breach of human rights, at one point in time at one housing tower people were locked in their homes. They were not allowed outside to get fresh air and exercise. They were given culturally inappropriate food. All sorts of horrible things happened. What was the Greens’ response when the government came back and wanted to extend the emergency powers? The Greens came back and greenlighted the emergency powers. They did not say, ‘Well, the government might’ve abused human rights and did awful things in the housing towers.’ No, they did not do any of that. They just went ahead and greenlighted the government to keep going with the emergency powers.

At the time, if I can jog this Parliament’s memory, I tried to insert an amendment into the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, which was recommendation 2 of the Ombudsman’s report. She recommended that the Public Health and Wellbeing Act be amended to allow fresh air and exercise to anyone detained under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act in line with common prisoners, because prisoners get better rights than people detained under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act. In fact the Ombudsman thought it was so important that the term ‘fresh air’ can be found over 90 times in the report. This was a big deal, and when I put forward this amendment, the Greens voted against fresh air and exercise for people detained in public housing towers, who might have been detained again if there had been another lockdown in the towers. Thankfully that did not happen. But the Greens voted against fresh air and exercise as a human right. I will not be lectured to on human rights by the Greens, and I will not be supporting this political agenda here. That is all I have to say on this.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (15:03): I am pleased to rise to speak on this motion 340 moved by Dr Ratnam that this house:

- (1) notes the government’s housing statement outlines an intention to demolish and redevelop Melbourne’s 44 public housing high-rise buildings by 2051, including a plan to build a majority of private homes on these publicly owned sites ...

I will not detail all of the motion, but I will outline (2)(a), the cost modelling; (2)(b), the compulsory relocation and displacement of public housing residents; (2)(c), the adequacy of consultations with stakeholders, including councils and residents in these communities; and (2)(d), the efficacy of the proposed financial, legal and project delivery models.

In supporting in this motion I want to say that families in Victoria at the moment are suffering from the cost-of-living crisis and the housing affordability issues. Unfortunately, under this government the delay when it comes to building new homes includes social housing, and our most vulnerable Victorians are being left out in the cold. We recognise and support the need for Victoria's most vulnerable to have access to public housing. If those from various low socioeconomic backgrounds do not have access to safe and secure housing, then the ladder of equal opportunities is taken from under their feet.

This is not the Australian way, nor is it the Victorian way. In speaking to this motion, I want to note the current state of Victoria at the moment. Victoria's population is around 6.9 million people, and it is projected to be 8.8 million by 2041. By 2051 the population is expected to be around 11.2 million, with greater Melbourne having 9 million people and there being 2.2 million in the outer regions. Looking at Victorian building rates, from 2010 to 2014 approximately 30,000 properties were built per year, and between 2017 and 2021 that grew to about 65,000 per year on average. The number of new properties proportional to the increase in population growth was roughly about 0.4 in 2016 and 0.6 in 2019. This basically means that the number of newly built homes is less than the population increase every year. Basically, housing developments are not meeting our population growth.

On social housing, on the other hand, Victoria has the lowest ratio of social housing stock in Australia. We are looking at 2.9 per cent of the total housing stock. The Victorian government says that when the Big Housing Build ends in 2051 social housing will make up about 3.5 per cent of housing stock – homes – only 3.5 per cent. The Grattan Institute states:

Victoria's housing crisis has been building for a long time. Within living memory, Victoria was a place where housing costs were manageable, and people of all ages and incomes had a reasonable chance to own a home ...

But now:

Home ownership is falling, renter poverty is rising, and more people are becoming homeless.

That is just the reality of the moment that we are facing. Social housing is more important than ever with our situation. The current housing statement tends to conflate social and affordable housing as a single category without distinguishing between construction targets for each housing type. The proposal to increase the government's investment in social housing begs the question: how are they going to pay for those commitments?

The recent report of the public inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis conducted by the Legal and Social Issues Committee included 23 findings and 34 recommendations. I want to outline one recommendation I quietly recall, and that is recommendation 30:

That the Victorian Government commit to building 60,000 new social housing dwellings by 2034, with 40,000 completed by 2028.

I believe the estimate of 60,000 new homes to be built by the government over the next 10 years underestimates the need and what is required. Regardless of the recommendation in the report of 40,000 homes needing to be built by 2028, the government must demonstrate they can meet the target in 10 years time.

Unfortunately, under this government many promises have been broken. Under the Big Housing Build from 2021 to 2023 public housing was supposed to include sales and demolitions totalling 3180 homes. In the same period only 4621 homes have been completely built as part of the big build. That is an increase of 1441 homes. In that amount of time only 1400 homes have been built. I have got a note that there has been a decrease in the number of public housing bedrooms available since 2017, when there were about 161,150 bedrooms. As at June 2023 there were only about 157,600 bedrooms. That is due to the demolition of properties in the public housing market.

When it comes to the management and delivery of social housing, under this government the management and delivery of big major projects is always an issue. When it comes to managing the public housing crisis for vulnerable Victorians, Victoria is in dire straits, and unfortunately they are the ones being left out in the cold. The rent tax introduced by this government has restricted supply and increased the cost of private rental, driving more vulnerable Victorians onto a record public housing waiting list.

Since 2018 the government has wasted \$4 billion on public housing but only delivered an extra 221 homes, as stated earlier, you may have heard, in this chamber. Victorians who have been pushed out of our private housing market need to go into a Victorian government public housing option. More than 3000 homes have been added to the waiting list since 2018, and the wait time on the waiting list to secure a safe home has doubled. With cuts to housing flagged by this government in the upcoming budget, it is clear that the situation is going to get worse.

On this side of the chamber we understand the importance of delivering public housing so the vulnerable are not forced onto the street. Besides the issue of delivering social housing, this inquiry would give clear indications and answer some very important questions. I know that people have spoken quite a bit on the actual 44 public housing high rises, but it is about more than that. This inquiry would help establish how this government is going to deliver all the social housing, not just the flats, and provide transparency on how they will deliver it, whether they will meet the targets and how they will commit to delivering those targets – basically the standards versus transparency in relation to what they are saying.

The inquiry would answer some of the questions in relation to the 44 public housing towers, our state's most vulnerable assets, worth billions of dollars. Taxpayers have got a right to understand what is happening to them. Only 1300 homes have been built over the last six years, including in the alleged big build. It would ask those questions. The 60,000 families waiting on the waiting list: where are they going to go? The relocation plan for the tens of thousands of people from the towers: where are they going to go? What will be the impact on government services currently operating from the towers? What services are going to go? What is the modelling?

Before finishing off, we have looked at and mentioned various estates we have tried to refurbish over the years. I understand that, but this government are not delivering what they promised. This inquiry would give us some transparency about how they are going to meet their promises. I will conclude there. My time is about finished. I will support the member's motion.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:13): The motion before us seeks to set up an inquiry into the planned redevelopment and rebuilding of the 44 public housing towers across inner Melbourne. It sits in an important context of a debate that we have been having for a while both in this chamber and in the broader community about the housing crisis. We know there is an acute housing crisis in this state, partly because the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee published a report on it in November last year called *The Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria*. We have had a parliamentary committee look at the matters substantively to be dealt with by this motion – calling for a parliamentary committee to look at these matters – within the term of this Parliament, in the last 12 months.

Another parliamentary committee is not going to fix the housing crisis. Building more houses will fix the housing crisis. Opposing building housing condemns more people to living in housing insecurity, it locks people out of home ownership and it makes the social housing waiting list grow longer. Every time people stand up and condemn social housing developments, every time people stand up and say 'We shouldn't do it in this particular place' – as members of this house do regularly – they are condemning people to living in insecure housing for longer and they are condemning the social housing waiting list to grow longer. Those are only actions of people who do not care about solving the housing crisis but only care about perpetuating it, and that is exactly what is motivating those who oppose the building of more social housing in this state. There are two different questions that we need

to address in the context of this debate in my view. One is a question of substance: do we need to redevelop the towers? The second is a question of process: do we need this inquiry? Hopefully in the course of the next 7 minutes and 45 seconds I will be able to get through some of those issues.

The first issue is, as I have mentioned, we do need to build more houses. That is what this Labor government is doing: \$9.2 billion in new housing construction since 2014; \$5.3 billion in the Big Housing Build, 12,000 new dwellings; \$1 billion in regional Victoria; \$1.2 billion to upgrade existing stock; and \$1.1 billion for homelessness services. I cannot count the number of times I have stood up in this chamber in the last 15 months and talked about the social housing development being built in Southern Metropolitan in Melbourne. I think last week I was up twice talking about it – the new houses that we have built and opened and residents have moved back into. There is New Street in Brighton. There is Centre Road, Brighton. There is the Markham estate in Ashburton. There is the block in Cheltenham that we visited a few weeks ago. Labor is building houses and tenants are moving back into them. We are doing them.

Secondly, do these towers need redevelopment? That is at the crux of the debate. The position that the Greens have put before us is that in their view we do not need to redevelop these towers, that somehow the inherent problems that exist with the structure, design and condition of this public housing stock is acceptable. They think it is acceptable. I do want to just quote a little bit from evidence that the CEO of Homes Victoria gave to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee last year. We have already had evidence that this motion calls for delivered before the Parliament's committee that this motion seeks to send an inquiry to. On the first two towers to be rebuilt as part of the 44 in Carlton, known as the red bricks, he said:

The sewer stacks – the sewer system – completely failed on them; I know there was a lot of publicity about that. Those two towers in particular, as I said, are uninhabitable, not viable in any way and certainly have to come down ... Of course they are going to be part of the housing accelerator fund of nearly half a billion dollars that the Commonwealth ... has paid to the Victorian government, and they are the first announcement. They will be the first cab off the rank. I think, from memory, there are 98 in each block, so 196 ... we will be converting those into 236.

The red-brick towers are condemned because their sewer stacks are broken. They are uninhabitable, and they need to be replaced. That is the first piece of evidence as to whether we need them. Maybe it is a problem with just those two is what some may suggest. The CEO of Homes Victoria, again in evidence to the committee, went on to say:

The other towers are prone to a number of issues, certainly inadequate elevators in terms of just not enough realistically for people to use. They have been retrofitted with sprinkler systems. Obviously when they were first designed they did not have sprinkler systems – fire suppression systems. They have been put in, but the nature of the building is that ... the elevator pit fills with water, short-circuits the control board and then the elevators are out of action for some time – 24 to 48 hours – and then you have got the situation where you have got people having to use stairs, sometimes up to 20 and 22 storeys. The elevators are an issue, heating and cooling are an issue in particular, but just generally, those properties were designed in the 50s and built in the late 50s and early 60s and 70s. Having been through a number of them, I think it is fair to say that their time is well past what we would expect for modern standards for Victorians to live in.

That was the independent evidence of the CEO of Homes Victoria to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee about why it is important to do them. Then we get the question: couldn't we just refurbish them? Couldn't we just go in and try and fix some of these problems? This was a question in fact that Mr Puglielli asked of the CEO of Homes Victoria at the Legal and Social Issues Committee on 10 October 2023, so not a long time ago. Mr Puglielli, amongst other things, asked:

... has there been an effort to explore alternatives like refurbishment and renovation?

Mr Newport:

I think first of all the program from start to end at this stage is predicted to run somewhere around 27, 28 years, so by the point you are doing that you are talking some of the towers could well be 80 years of age. The particular construction methodology – effectively concrete panels, ceiling heights that do not permit services

to run between floors, some of the issues I talked about with regard to elevators, no heating, no cooling, no verandahs, it is very difficult to even clean windows, it is hot in summer, cold in winter – all of those factors were taken into account. Also just purely from the point of view of basic maintenance being able to be done over those properties, it would be something in the order of about \$2.3 billion over 20 years just to keep them in the condition that they are now ...

This is not to improve them, not to make them more accessible, not to make them comply with disability access standards and not to enable someone who has a walker to use a shower, because of the construction of the concrete hobs in the bathrooms. \$2.3 billion just for basic maintenance – new paint and the like. That is what it would cost just to keep them in the condition they are in now, which fails disability access standards and which condemns the residents who have mobility issues to have inaccessible showers in their homes. That is what those who oppose these redevelopments are condemning their residents to.

The other point that was made in the course of the inquiry was concerns about dislocating residents – fair comment – but in the process of renovating, because of the nature of the concrete and the amount of noise that is generated from using basic drills in those environments you have got to relocate residents if you want to do any refurbishments. So even if we accept that it was possible to fix the problems in these towers, the process of doing it would result in resident relocation.

I do not have enough time to go through all of the evidence that was presented to the Legal and Social Issues Committee in October of last year. The committee has examined these issues. It is on the public record. I suggest people read it; it is very, very illuminating. This whole motion is not about giving people more housing. It is not about giving people housing that meets basic accessibility standards that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. It is about something else altogether. Sadly I do not have time to go into all of those issues, but I hope this contribution has illuminated some of the issues that a committee of this Parliament has already examined in the last 12 months.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:23): I rise to speak on behalf of Legalise Cannabis on the proposal to establish an inquiry into the demolition and redevelopment of, well, not simply 44 towers but really multiple estates. I come to this with a deep sense of engagement. Personally, I worked on the Kensington estate redevelopment on the community reference group and also on the building standards committee for about eight years, and I was intimately involved in that project. Of course that was the first government PPP – public–private partnership – to explore this process of redevelopment. It also came after Jeff Kennett had I think nuked the first tower. Then the incoming Labor government decided to refurbish the remaining two towers at Kensington, and I will come back to that. In thinking about this motion, the first thing is that this is not about buildings, it is about people. It is about the people who are living in these towers, and it is about the people that need to be able to access affordable, safe housing, whether it is public or whether it is community based. Unfortunately, I think much of the debate that has occurred in this place has all too often either broken on partisan grounds or broken on rhetorical semantics that have not allowed for a really fulsome discussion of the issues.

I do come to this with very strongly held views, and I also know really well a lot of the people who live in these places. I have lived in Kensington for 30 years. I am a couple of hundred metres from the Kensington estate, I am about 500 metres as the crow flies from the North Melbourne estate and probably 700 metres from the Flemington estate, and I have relationships with all of those people. Those people, particularly the ones in the towers, are very vulnerable. They are people who have a precarious hold on life in terms of financials as well as accommodation as well as social relations. There are lots of problems with these buildings, and I will come back to that.

In the case of the Flemington estate these people went through a process in 2017 under the then housing minister – I am disassociating this from the current housing minister absolutely on this point – and the exercise that went on in the Flemington estate in 2017 was absolutely atrocious. The government simply ignored all of the lessons that came out of the Kensington redevelopment and basically told both resident representatives and local community representatives to just stay out of the way. It was

really an atrocious approach, and of course it imploded. Then many of these residents were further traumatised by the effects of the lockdown during COVID, and I do not think there is any debate about how terrible it was for those people. In coming to the process of demolition and relocation that is being proposed through this project – and I am not saying that this is without merit as a project – we are dealing with people who have been through hell and back, and I think that needs to be more important than what sometimes might be political pointscoring.

We have sought to work with government and with the sponsors of this motion to find common ground. I thank the minister and the minister's staff for their time, and I am disappointed that we could not find middle ground between the sponsors and the government.

Returning to the Kensington estate, one of the outworkings of the Kensington estate redevelopment was a report by Swinburne University that critically evaluated the processes that had been undertaken through the development process. There were valuable learnings for how future projects were to be potentially rolled out, and in the 2017 rollout those were completely ignored. From talking to the minister, I understand that in fact the government has a far more sympathetic approach than that, and I welcome that. That includes things like consultation not only with the residents but also with other neighbourhood stakeholders, with service providers, with schools and with health services, because when you close down these buildings you profoundly – profoundly – impact the whole ecosystem that exists around them, and that is a really big issue.

I take it from Minister Shing's private discussions with us, if I may say that, that she is concerned to make sure that there is not a replication of that. But at the same time we are also hearing that multiple towers will be demolished in the very, very near future, and clearly central to what is in the Swinburne report is that you do not just knock down the buildings. You actually need to do a lot of work prior to that, and it is not just about consulting with the residents concerned.

There are obviously different views, depending on who you speak to, about whether or not the consultation has been good or otherwise. Certainly in terms of the people I speak to – and these are the people that grab me when I am on the street going to the supermarket or into the local shops – they are deeply traumatised. It is not a product of being told this by the Greens or whatever. These are people who are genuinely distressed, and the communications with these people, the consultations with their representatives and the consultations with other stakeholders in the neighbourhoods have not been adequate.

In terms of the motion itself, it seeks to address a number of things. Clearly this motion comes after, for want of a better term, a failed documents motion. That documents motion could be critiqued as having been a bit of a shopping list, but the fact of the matter is that there was a lot of information that was sought which would have informed this debate. Rather than simply taking this position or that position, there is hard data that could have been presented any time over the last six months that would have addressed questions like what is the business case for the redevelopment.

Ten years ago, when the Kensington housing estate towers were being refurbished, there were two building realities. One building reality was that these buildings are hugely overengineered. They are incredibly robust structures, but within them the services had profoundly decayed. If you look at the towers now, they are pretty much fully occupied. In many cases they have been retrofitted and converted. There are a whole lot of things that can be done in these buildings because they are simply so robust. So to suggest, I think, that there is \$2.3 billion which will be band-aids – I would really like to see the evidence of that. If it was fine to do it a decade ago, what has changed on a 50-year-old building? I live in a 148-year-old house. There are various colloquialisms I could apply, but I think the Acting President would take umbrage with the descriptions I might use. But these are very robust buildings, and they are retrofittable. You can double-glaze them, you can ventilate them, you can sprinkler them. Again, none of the data that has been presented would change that.

I guess in that sense if you are going to take out 44 towers – take the government’s own numbers – we are looking at about 10,000 people being decanted. If you do a basic back-of-the-envelope on what is being built, it would seem to me that what the government is proposing to build and roll out will be fully absorbed just by that relocation process. If we allow, say, four to five years to get these projects rolling, and that is how long these things take to get to commissioning, we are basically going to see a situation where the government will be rolling out replacements equivalent to those high-rise towers at about two per annum for 20 years. I just cannot see how the numbers currently stack up.

We have a whole range of other issues. We would welcome disclosure from the government as to the sorts of issues that have been identified, and that does not need to await an inquiry. Obviously terms of reference can be amended if those documents are provided and the rationale is provided, and I hope that the government will avail itself of that. I know that is not as good as what we have been discussing, but that may be a way forward. I would just conclude by thanking the minister again for her time and the Greens for their time, and we will be supporting the motion.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:33): There is only a minute to go. I think I will just leave it, because it is not worth speaking for a minute on this. My colleagues have probably canvassed the issues very thoroughly, and I will leave it at that.

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (15:34): Firstly, thanks to everyone for their really thoughtful contributions to this difficult, challenging but really important debate for this Parliament. I want to thank some members, particularly from the government, for sharing some information with us about some of the details that had not been furnished formally beyond an inquiry that the Greens helped establish. It does highlight how important it is for parliamentary inquiries to be conducted, because we do get information, we do get expert witnesses and we get the department before parliamentarians. That is more information than we have got to date from any other source from the government – that parliamentary inquiry the Greens helped initiate into the rental housing crisis. If we got that much information through that inquiry, just imagine how much more information we could get from this inquiry and how we could improve residents’ outcomes because of it. Responding to the minister’s assertion that we have not sought briefings and that we have not brought this matter to the Parliament and to her prior to today, we have relentlessly pursued this within the chamber for six months without pause, the government has not offered us a single briefing and the minister did not reach out to us to discuss this motion today.

I think it is most important to understand, as I explained at the start, that this motion and the need for this inquiry has come directly from feedback we have had from residents. From day one of the government’s announcement we wanted to be informed by the community, so we went out doorknocking. We have doorknocked all of the Flemington and the North Melbourne towers, we are making headway in the Richmond towers, we are beginning in Prahran and more, and our aim is to doorknock and talk to every resident in all of those towers over the coming months and years. They have told us that they are really worried about what is happening. They want more assurances, they want more answers and more justifications, they want better outcomes and they want housing certainty.

In terms of responding to some of the assertions that have been made by some government members that there is no heating and cooling and that is why the towers have to be redeveloped, well, there is heating. The issue has been cooling, which we have been pursuing. The government actually made an announcement at the last election promising cooling, but we are yet to see how that is being rolled out across the towers. If you want to talk about accessibility, you might want to look at the new community housing you built at Ascot Vale, where in one of the community homes the residents have had to move out for a number of issues already within months of moving in. If you look at the rail up the stairs to get into the apartment, because it is not accessible, the rail has been put on the wrong side. There is a big drop to the garden, and the residents said ‘We could fall off these stairs into the garden.’ The builders said, ‘We’ll just put more mulch up to get the garden a bit higher so you fall less,’ and they

are not moving the rail. That is what is happening at the new community build at one of these estates that they redeveloped.

It is really important we get to the bottom of what is going on and how we improve these standards and outcomes for residents and how we save and protect public housing, because public housing is for all of us. It is the bedrock of good housing policy, and we cannot make housing affordable in Victoria and across Australia if we do not build more public housing. What the government is planning to do is demolish the public housing that we have and not recommit to public housing at 42, at this stage, of those 44 sites. It has been canvassed during this debate the needs of public housing residents and the importance of thinking about how we treat people. How we treat people matters. How much information, how they are consulted and how they are involved in the decision-making about their lives with something as fundamental as housing are just so important.

In conclusion, I was just reflecting yesterday, which was World Social Work Day – happy World Social Work Day to all the social workers out there – on my journey as a social worker. One of the first things I did when I was studying was to volunteer at the Margaret Oats Collingwood soup van in Richmond, where we visited the towers weekly for five years. That was my stint; it is still going 25 years later. That was the relationship that a number of us had built with residents in public housing. We saw the condition of those homes then. We heard from the residents directly, and we have continued that work today. So for all those public housing residents who have been speaking to us, thank you for informing this debate today. We brought this to the Parliament on your behalf. We do this work for all of you. We are on your side, and I promise you we will never give up.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (19): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Richard Welch

Noes (16): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (15:45): I move:

That consideration of order of the day, general business, 1, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Production of documents

Production of documents

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:45): I move motion 339 as amended:

That this house:

- (1) notes the failure of the Leader of the Government to comply with a number of resolutions of the Council requiring the Leader of the Government to table specified documents in the Legislative Council by particular dates, and further notes that orders for the following have not been complied with:
 - (a) Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project on 22 March 2023;
 - (b) gas and electricity supplies on 15 November 2023;
 - (c) redevelopment of high-rise public housing sites on 15 November 2023;

- (d) kangaroo harvest management plan on 29 November 2023;
- (e) Commonwealth infrastructure review on 29 November 2023;
- (f) Port of Hastings application for offshore wind turbine facilities on 7 February 2024;
- (g) Victoria's review of Victoria's approach to illicit tobacco regulation on 7 February 2024;
- (2) affirms the privileges, immunities and powers conferred on the Council pursuant to section 19 of the Constitution Act 1975, and the power to make standing orders under section 43 of that act;
- (3) affirms the right of the Council to require the production of documents;
- (4) requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council by 1 pm on 30 April 2024 the documents ordered by the Council in the motions identified in paragraphs (1)(a) to (g);
- (5) further notes that on 6 March 2024 the government claimed executive privilege with respect to Ken Lay's final report into a second medically supervised injecting room handed to the office of the former Minister for Mental Health in the week beginning 29 May 2023, which was required to be produced by the Council's resolution on 21 February 2024;
- (6) requires the Leader of the Government to comply with standing order 10.03, which would include delivery of Ken Lay's final report into a second medically supervised injecting room to the Clerk and may involve assessment by an independent legal arbiter, to be appointed by the President; and
- (7) permits that if the Leader of the Government has not complied with standing orders 10.01 to 10.03 in relation to all the documents listed in paragraphs (1) and (5) within the time frame specified in paragraph (4), the Council will at the conclusion of formal business on Tuesday 30 April 2024 (or if formal business does not occur that day, at the conclusion of formal business on the next sitting day) give precedence for a non-government member to move, without leave, 'That this house suspends the Leader of the Government from the service of the Council for the remainder of today and for the next two subsequent sitting days'.

The motion also makes it clear that there are ancient and well-understood powers of the chamber to call for people and documents. The standing orders in that chapter 10 section are very carefully drafted, modelled I should say on New South Wales. They not only set up the procedure for the production of documents, the scheduling and the tables that are required but also, importantly, set up an arbitral procedure that enables adjudication by an independent legally qualified person where claims of executive privilege are made.

If the mover of such a motion, which is Mr Ettershank, so believes after sighting the document with the Clerk – they are not allowed to take it away, but the procedures are there, they are modelled on New South Wales and they have been successfully implemented over many years in New South Wales, where documents are brought to the Clerk and they are looked at by the mover – that there is a dispute with the government's position, they can go to the arbiter, who is an independent highly qualified legal person, a person beyond reproach, who is able to then send a report to the chamber and say this document should or should not be able to claim privilege.

So it is a fair process. It is modelled on a jurisdiction that is like us, the Legislative Council of New South Wales. It is probably arguable that the powers of this chamber are ever so slightly greater, but the powers of the Legislative Council in New South Wales have actually been tested. They were tested in the famous Sydney water case, the Egan case that went to the Supreme Court in New South Wales and ultimately to the High Court. Bret Walker – QC at the time, or SC he might have been – was the relevant barrister, and he was successful in prosecuting that case, establishing very clearly that not only did the chamber in New South Wales have the right to get documents but it had the right to enforce these matters too.

It then addresses if the government does not obey this second directive, if the Leader of the Government does not respond. Each of these has had a single motion brought forward. Each of them has had some correspondence from the government, but the government has then largely ignored things and kicked things forward without actually providing the documents. This motion puts a firm time line of 30 April. It is a reasonable time line. It is not a short time line, especially considering that many of the documents sought go way back, deep into 2023, some of them back as far as March, more

than a year ago. They will be more than a year long in the tooth when the final deadline of 30 April is reached.

The simplest way for the government to respond to this would be to support the motion and to deliver the documents – to deliver the injecting room document, the Lay report – to the clerks so that the arbitration procedure could potentially apply, and in the case of the other documents bring or deliver them to the chamber and do that in such a way that the chamber is able to manage those documents properly from there. Just the mere decision – ‘We’re not going to do anything. We’re going to sit here. We’ll send a holding letter in the first instance and then do nothing further’ – is unsatisfactory. The government knows it is unsatisfactory. There is no doubt about the powers of the chamber to do this. There is no doubt that we need a motion that is fair, is moderate and actually leads to a reasonable outcome here.

If the government does not deliver those documents that are ordered by 30 April, then what will occur is that the opportunity will be presented in the chamber for a motion to impose some clear sanctions. This would occur immediately after that chop time, which would be around 1 o’clock on the 30th. That would give the government time to bring those into the chamber on the day and would give the chamber plenty of time to look at these in the coming period. If the government does not respond properly to this motion, part (7) of the motion actually lays out a way forward – that is, that at the conclusion of formal business, perhaps around 1 o’clock, perhaps even slightly later, on 30 April, or on an alternate sitting day if for some reason we are not sitting, precedence would be given to a non-government member to move without leave that:

This house suspends the Leader of the Government from the service of the Council for the remainder of today and for the next two subsequent sitting days.

I am not wanting to ever move that motion. I am not wanting a non-government member to be in the position where they want to move the motion. What would be preferable is for the government to provide the documents – provide the Lay report to the clerks so that the arbitral process can commence. That would avoid the need for any of these activities later. If that motion was moved, there would be a debate, as would occur under the current orders in operation for the chamber. It would be a 90-minute debate, and then the motion would be put. It would be a motion that could be amended, a motion which the opposition would be very open to discussing ahead of time in a reasonable, moderate way. But we do not believe the government can go on and on and on not complying with the orders of the chamber. Those orders are made in good faith. The chamber is then in the position where it should seek those documents and pursue those. Again, the government might come forward with some documents, and they might say, ‘Look, here is one tranche of documents, and there are legitimate reasons why we can’t provide other documents.’ That is a matter for debate within the chamber. The chamber can engage in that, but what the chamber cannot deal with is the government just not responding any further than an initial holding response and letting it drift out in some cases, as I say, more than a year into the future. The chamber is being treated poorly. The chamber is in a position where it should say no, that is enough, we want a proper procedure. We have got a process to arbitrate on some of these matters. If that is what the government believes is the right way forward, we are happy to employ that process, and an independent, legally qualified person can look at that.

In the case of the other documents, the government just needs to get on and provide those. If amongst those documents there are individual documents that the government believes for public safety or other reasons ought not be released, it should say so. It should, according to the standing order, provide a tabulated list of the documents and the reasons why it is providing or not providing those and attach the documents or parts of documents that it is releasing. If there is a section of a document that for legitimate reasons is not able to be provided, let us have that discussion. But we cannot have that discussion where there are no documents provided and where there is no proper answer or way forward provided.

This, again, is a very modest and reasonable proposal. It is a way to seek these documents and to assert the rights of the chamber, but to do so in a calm and rational way and to have the government respond

properly. I reiterate that my favoured outcome here is that the government simply provides the document and goes to arbitration perhaps for the document that it has claimed executive privilege on, and then there is a reasonable way forward for everyone.

This is a sensible motion and a reasonable way forward that asserts the rights of the chamber. These are the historical rights of the chamber to call for people and papers – the powers of the House of Commons in 1856 expressed in our constitution and backed up by the long legal experience of this chamber. Going back, the Legislative Assembly called for documents in the middle of the 1870s and 80s. These powers were used as far back as then in the other chamber, interestingly. In this chamber these powers are rightly cherished. They are rightly seen as the bedrock of the chamber's powers of scrutiny, its powers of holding responsible governments accountable, and that is what we are seeking to do here today. I implore crossbenchers to support the motion and hope that the government will see the good sense of coming to a collaborative position on this.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (15:58): I rise to speak on the motion that has been brought forward by Mr Davis. At the outset I indicate that the government will not be supporting Mr Davis's motion. The hypocrisy of those opposite truly is astounding. Today they are bringing forward a motion on the Leader of the Government in this place while they are hopelessly divided on the leadership of the Liberal Party. I appreciate that it has been a long weekend –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, this is a very narrow debate about the provision of documents. I did not in the lead speech here in any way widen the motion. I talked about this in terms of the technical and other details in the constitution and the standing orders, and this is not an opportunity to broaden the debate out into some general frolic.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: On the point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis has clearly moved a motion that relates to the Leader of the Government, although I note that he is not in a leadership position on that side, so I find that a little amusing as well. But I note that Mr Davis has moved a motion in relation to the Leader of the Government, and it is totally appropriate that matters of leadership are part of this debate.

Georgie Crozier: On the point of order, Acting President, the minister is trying her best, but what she was talking about in her opening remarks has no relevance to this important motion that we are debating this afternoon, and I would ask you to ask her to come back to the substance of this important motion so that we can get on with it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): If the minister could just come back to the motion, that would be great.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Thank you, Acting President. I note that the motion refers to the Leader of the Government, and I am indeed referring to leadership in my contribution here today. But I do appreciate that it has been a very long weekend for those opposite, particularly when the Leader of the Opposition enjoys the solid support of as few as 10 MPs in the 29-member party room. This is not the most important issue, although clearly for those opposite it is the most important issue that they want to spend their general business time on today. This motion –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, Acting President, I know the minister is trying her best to be quite smart. It is not working. This is a very narrow motion. It is an important motion about transparency and accountability, and I would ask you to ask the minister to stop sledging the opposition and being ridiculous in her commentary and to come back to the substance of the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Whilst she is the lead speaker for the government, if the minister could confine her remarks a bit closer to the motion.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Thank you, Acting President, and I am pleased to speak to this motion. I am concerned in relation to the moving of this motion that it says a lot about the priority of those

opposite that it does not extend to health, it does not extend to education, it does not extend to cost of living or children or disability or jobs or transport. Instead they want to focus their attention on this matter in their time today – Legislative Council documents motions – not disability, not children, not transport, not health, not education. It makes some sense though, I would note, that when you include the indented paragraphs in Mr Davis’s motion there are more individual paragraphs in his motion than there are members of the opposition who support his leader. So, Mr Davis, I am more than happy to speak to this motion today. All you have to do is look at the voting record of those opposite to see what they are focused on, and it is not what is most important to Victorians, as I have just said. Last sitting week they moved a reasoned amendment to delay the delivery of the government’s 50 early learning centres reform, and in the sitting week before that they moved an amendment –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, Acting President, I think I am going to be rising to make a number of points of order, because again the minister is waffling. She is talking about everything but what is the substance of the motion. This is an important motion. It is about accountability and transparency in relation to documents motions that this house moved. She might be doing her best to try and be the lead speaker, but I would ask you again to bring her back to the substance of what this motion is about.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: On the point of order, Acting President, the substance of this motion goes to the leadership of the government, and it is entirely appropriate that in considering this motion there is also a contribution in this place that draws the distinction between leadership on that side of the house and leadership on this side of the house.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): This is fast becoming debate. I caution people: if they have got a point of order that is related to the standing orders, have at it, but do not bring a point of debate.

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, the substance of the member’s idea of a point of order was that because the word ‘Leader’ is mentioned, anything about leadership could be discussed in a broad sense. The ‘Leader’ word is actually the title of the Leader of the Government. I have given the respectful title, as you would expect. The orders that were made in the Council were made for the direction of the Leader of the Government, and for that reason the motion talks directly about the Leader of the Government in the role that she holds there. It is a narrow motion calling for actions around those matters.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Thank you, Mr Davis. If the minister could keep to the motion, that would be great.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Thank you, Acting President. To pick up on Mr Davis’s point there, without further pursuing the point of order, ‘Leader of the Opposition’ is also a title, so it is entirely relevant that the comparisons are drawn.

Those opposite are focused on documents motions while those of us on this side – and I know it has been very foreign to many of you over there for quite some time now – are focused on government. Contrary to the allegations that Mr Davis has put about noncompliance with such motions, as this house is aware, the government does respond to these motions. The government does respond to documents motions, and where it is required we ask for further time. This is a stunt by those opposite to simply trivialise the work that is required to be undertaken by government officials, by departments and by government itself when we respond to documents motions.

In addition, we are debating a motion that proposes an action in over a month’s time, which assumes therefore that certain other actions will be taken. As the Leader of the Government stated in her response to the documents motion tabled in the previous sitting week – Leader of the Government, hence why we are talking about leadership in this motion:

Whilst a claim of executive privilege is made at this time, the Government stands by its commitment to release the report alongside the government’s response to the report.

Do you need me to repeat that, Mr Davis, or are you still confused? As the Leader of the Government stated in her response to a documents motion previously:

Whilst a claim of executive privilege is made at this time, the Government stands by its commitment to release the report alongside the government's response to the report.

For this motion that we are debating to propose an action in over a month's time, assuming that other certain actions may or may not occur in the time prior to that, is simply ridiculous. It is coming from a confused opposition that is not focused on any of the real issues of the Victorian people – not on health, not on education, not on children, not on disability – but focused instead on a Legislative Council documents motion. As I highlighted earlier, this is merely a stunt by those opposite, who are focused on themselves rather than on improving the lives of Victorians, and all we have to do, as I was saying, is simply look at your voting record. As I was about to say before, you sought to delay with a reasoned amendment the 50 early learning centres –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, this is again a very narrow motion about documents. It is not about a general view about politics in the state or voting in the chamber or whatever.

Ryan Batchelor: On the point of order, Acting President, the terms of the motion, particularly at points (2) and (3), go to quite expansive matters about the powers and functions of both this Council, the Parliament and the constitution. If Mr Davis had wanted this to be narrow motion, he should have drafted it that way.

David Davis: Further to the point of order, Acting President, it is a narrow motion referring to the specific powers of the chamber, which I have enumerated closely in my contribution, and they are about powers to call for documents.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): I will ask the minister to go back to the motion, but I might also point out the interjections are fairly wideranging too. It is a bit rough to be expecting the minister to stick to one narrow path whilst I am hearing all sorts of things from the other side. If we can just sort of cruise this through until the end, that would be good.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Thank you very much, Acting President. Today's motion really is a perfect example of the disunity on that side. As I drew attention to earlier, Mr Davis is not a member of the coalition leadership in this place anymore; however, he is leading a motion that provides for the ability to suspend the Leader of the Government. It leads me to these questions: did the leadership group sign off on this motion? Has the party room endorsed this approach? *(Time expired)*

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:08): What a disappointing contribution from the minister just now. For one, I was not here last week when the government refused to release the documents, so I asked Mr Davis to move this motion.

A member interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: You know where I was – a bereavement in my family. So no, to your question, the leadership group was not fully briefed. I think that is just a low blow, frankly.

This important motion goes to the heart of what we are here to do: talk about accountability and transparency in the interests of Victorians. We are elected on behalf of Victorians into this place to be a place of review, a house of review. When you ask for documents around certain issues, of course there might be some sensitivities, and we understand some of those sensitivities, but a lot of this does not apply to issues that should be in the public domain. Of course I talk about the issue around the Lay report. That issue has been canvassed in this place for years. We have been calling on the government to release the Lay report. There have been multiple iterations from Ken Lay in relation to a second injecting room. There has been lots of confusion and lots of consternation about it, and there have been concerns from business around the plans the government have. We have got the Yooralla building sitting empty down in Flinders Street. It cost over \$40 million. We have got businesses hearing from

all sorts of other stakeholders, Melbourne City Council and other stakeholders, about what they think needs to be done. We have had projected sites like near the Queen Victoria Market. That did not go down too well, so the government changed its plans on that. We have had the disaster that has happened in North Richmond in relation to the residents' concerns that have never been properly understood, and despite what the government might say, the ambulance call-outs, drug abuse and antisocial behaviour are still happening. I get emails, text messages and pictures from concerned residents every second day about what is happening in that community. It is no wonder that there are residents and businesses in the city that are also concerned about potentially having a drug-injecting room on their doorstep.

That is why we want to understand what Ken Lay has said. I think it is actually disrespectful to Mr Lay. He has done multiple iterations of this report. There have been draft reports, and obviously they were not what the government liked so, 'Off you go and do it again.' I find it incredible. Taxpayers have paid for this work, and taxpayers are not able to see the fruits of Mr Lay's labour. We need to see that draft report, and that is why we are calling for it. To talk about politics – that has been used as an approach by the government because it is not in their interests. They cannot get their act together, but that does not mean we cannot understand what is in the Lay report so we can work on getting a solution.

We need to be supporting these people with addictions – no question about that. I still would love to know how many people have been rehabilitated that have gone through the North Richmond injecting centre. I can tell you: not too many. The government has fudged all those figures for years.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, there are degrees, Mr Batchelor – to your interjection. I have been asking about this. You should hear the stories I have heard about Dr Clark, what has happened down there and the nurses down there. They have actually said what has gone on – some pretty severe and concerning behaviours have gone on in that injecting room. I would say that the public have not been fully informed. The Police Association Victoria put out a survey of their members, and they backed up the increase in criminal behaviour and the safety concerns in that area. There is no question –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, you can tip somebody's head up and get their airway open, and that is what is called saving a life.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: You can, and that is exactly what we proved when I questioned Dr Clark and those in the injecting room.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: I can tell you, Mr Batchelor – I am a nurse. I actually understand how an airway works, not you. It is not Narcan and it is not an intubation, which is quite a different approach. The statistics that you are talking about are something else.

This motion goes to looking at exactly what is needed in relation to releasing these documents that this house has absolutely asked for, whether it be the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project over a year ago, or a year Friday; gas and electricity supplies; or redevelopment of high-rise public housing sites. We have just had that debate in relation to public housing demolitions because you will not release some of the information. It is simply extraordinary, so hopefully the inquiry will find out a bit more on that issue. There is also the kangaroo harvest management plan, which Ms Bath has a great interest in; the Commonwealth infrastructure review; or the Port of Hastings' application for offshore wind turbine facilities – as Mr Davis has pointed out, that has been a complete farce, a complete debacle. Again,

there are so many issues around the government's decision-making process. They actually have not undertaken the work, and as a result we have got some dodgy and botched decisions that have occurred.

There is the review of Victoria's approach to illicit tobacco regulation. I actually want to see that. That is incredibly important, because look at what is happening with all of these tobacco shops being torched, the crimes that are going on, the links to criminal behaviour. It is an absolutely out-of-control situation that we have in Victoria – that issue alone, in terms of the government's hopeless inadequacy of dealing with this issue. These things should be undertaken, and they need to be released as per this house's wish. I say again we are a house of review. We have been elected by Victorians for that purpose. This is about accountability. It is about transparency. Unfortunately, we do not get transparency with this government. We never got it under the former government either. We saw that through so many situations where we were blocked, we were shut down and we were just not provided with the proper information.

I say again this goes to the heart of what we need to do. Our point 3 affirms the right of the Council to require the production of documents. Mr Davis has gone through very extensively in relation to legislative requirements, the constitutional powers and how they apply in relation to some of the specified documents. He has laid out very clearly a path where it can be undertaken and it can be utilised so that you can actually see what we are looking for here. I think that is a reasonable request to make, and I would urge those crossbenchers and the government to support this motion in the interests of transparency and in the interests of accountability. It is a simple motion that goes to the heart of why we need these documents released so that Victorians can actually understand and see what is going on. I urge you to support the motion.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (16:16): If only Hansard could record a sigh, because we appear to be back in this place again whereby the coalition is seeking to reinvent history around its track record on transparency and the provision of documents. I note, before we have any objections by way of people leaping to their feet – and I see Mr Davis may be in fact looking forward to an opportunity to talk about a relatively narrowly cast motion in the terms that he did when Minister Blandthorn was speaking – that in fact Ms Crozier has just traversed some pretty broad ground in relation to the subject matter of various matters described in this documents motion, and it is important to create that nexus between the subject matter of the documents being sought and the tactical efforts being used and indeed relied upon by many in this chamber to make various political points. In doing that, it is necessary perhaps to examine some of the history of the disclosure of information.

Mr Davis went right back in time almost to the Magna Carta and perhaps the annals of history around decision-making in a collective authorising environment, and what he did do was refer to longstanding obligations and indeed considerations as they relate to the provision of information, including but not limited to the way in which claims for documents are able reasonably to be tempered by the application of various matters of privilege to them, whether in whole or in part. This is again something which Mr Davis is well aware of, because he sought to rely upon that in the course of the discussion sought to be really drawn out by the former Liberal–National government here in Victoria in relation to the business case for the east–west link. I remember in the course of that particular process of longstanding obfuscation that the business case for the east–west link that was eventually released – eventually – was 11 pages long. The font size, as I recall, would have been about a 30-point font size. It was dot points, and not dot points in a font size of about 30 on both sides of the document; there were large-scale pictures on one side and then there were triangular dot points and a large-scale font. I think it was about the least comprehensive outline of a business case for a multibillion-dollar project that anybody could imagine. No wonder those opposite did not want to release it, because frankly it was an embarrassment. But that notwithstanding, the now opposition relied upon claims of executive privilege, cabinet in confidence and commercial in confidence, as it was entitled to do. Notwithstanding the absolutely shambolic, underwhelming disaster that was the basis upon which multibillion-dollar decisions were made, it was made for the purposes of consideration by the then

coalition cabinet. When we talk about transparency, we are also inviting a discussion around the way in which transparency operates, enabled by this Parliament, in the requests for documents and tempered by the operation of privilege as it might relate to cabinet in confidence or to commercial in confidence.

We have heard a lot about value for money – value for taxpayers money – in this place. Therefore it is at its very least disingenuous for those opposite and indeed anybody else to argue that commercial in confidence ought be relegated to the side in favour of disclosure when the very impact of that will almost axiomatically lead to a change in the way in which government negotiates and receives the benefit of large-scale contracts. This is a curious conundrum that those opposite have: on the one hand they have, as they are appropriately able to do, in government's view, relied upon the application of cabinet-in-confidence and commercial-in-confidence principles; on the other they are saying actually they do not matter because they have another purpose for seeking these documents and being able to make hay with them. We have seen an ongoing theme from those opposite around what is spectacular doublespeak, on the one hand wanting documents and on the other hand refusing or failing, whether through a combination of wilful blindness, ineptitude or otherwise forgetfulness, to provide them. In the 57th Parliament the coalition in fact left just under 1200 questions without notice unanswered. That is about double the amount of questions unanswered in the 58th Parliament. In addition to that, we saw, when documents were sought from the coalition government, no documents provided at all for 50 per cent of its motions. So I would invite people who are in the process of considering where they might sit on this particular motion to bear that in mind when listening to the ardent and highly principled rhetoric from those opposite, and indeed from Mr Davis in moving the motion.

We have also got a compressed format for documents, and the standing orders have been amended to be able to bring two short-order opportunities for documents motions per week. This was something which was spoken about with great enthusiasm from those on the crossbench wanting to ensure that there was no opportunity for a lack of interrogation of information and to be able to do more with less in a parliamentary sitting week of finite hours. It is pretty rich, therefore, for people to be seeking to penalise the Leader of the Government for not tabling responses to these documents motions when in fact it is the crossbench who have added to the waitlist of the documents that are now sought to be provided to the Parliament. We are talking about voluminous documents motions. We are talking about a process that requires significant assessment of the extent to which commercial in confidence or cabinet in confidence might apply. This is a process which government needs to work its way through. We do not do so in an effort – notwithstanding any claims that Mr Davis might make to the contrary – to obfuscate. This is about making sure that for all of the many classes of documents being sought it is well understood the extent to which they might have elements of cabinet in confidence or commercial in confidence apply to them and making decisions about disclosure that will not otherwise overstep the parameters of those privileges. I would like to see that we have a consideration of these matters by reference to not just the nature and the class of the documents but also their impact.

I was fortunate enough to be in this place in the first term of the Andrews government. What I saw at that time was utterly breathtaking: the opposition combined with others in the chamber to boot out the then Leader of the Government in this place Gavin Jennings for six months. For a six-month period there was no Leader of the Government in the chamber. What that meant was that at the very heart there was a lack of opportunity to interrogate the very things that the opposition and members of the crossbench were interested in hearing about. This is the most perverse of outcomes. On the one hand documents are being sought, but on the other hand, if they are not provided, we are going to remove the Leader of the Government from a chamber where there are otherwise opportunities to ask said Leader of the Government for information or answers to questions. We have heard a lot about the importance of having a chamber that can ask for and seek information and make inquiries, yet the substance of this motion is to boot the Leader of the Government out. It is otherworldly, the extent to which there has been a cognitive dissonance on this particular motion.

Government has careful processes, through the complexions of any government which is lucky enough to occupy incumbency, to assess documents and to facilitate their release. It would be another example of the trivial approach to tactical opportunity for the Leader of the Government to be removed from this place, thereby lessening the opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny in a search for answers or perhaps public opportunities to talk about the government and why those around this chamber not in government are somehow relevant to the work that we do.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:27): I am pleased to rise and support Mr Davis's motion 339 in relation to the production of a number of very serious and significant documents and the importance of that transparency that this house should be noted for. It is interesting that the lead minister for the Labor Party, for the Labor government, criticised us, saying that the issues contained within this motion are not of importance and citing some other quite important issues that need to be addressed.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, if Ms Bath has an allegation to put, she should do so by way of a substantive motion. Nobody has actually said that. Nobody has said that. There is no lead minister of any government that has said that.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): I might be able to help you with this. I think it is not a point of order as much as a debate, so as you were.

Melina BATH: Looking at the documents that are contained within this motion, these are very important documents that need to be in the public domain. They are very important particularly for my Eastern Victoria Region electorate. If we look at the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project document that the government is still holding close to its chest, this has great relevance for not only the transition into renewable energies but, in that transition, the creation of jobs and the upholding of a lifestyle in Eastern Victoria Region, in the valley, which is undergoing enormous challenges and pressures largely and overwhelmingly because of the Andrews, now Allan, government's policies. It is super important to be looking into and investigating what is happening with the HESC project. We know that the HESC project came through in a successful completion. It was a trial, literally as it said, energy supply chain project. It dealt with and converted coal from Loy Yang to hydrogen and then successfully shipped it from the Port of Hastings off to Japan. This government now has the opportunity to take up an offer from a consortium, in conjunction with the Japanese government, for \$3.2 billion. We want to understand what the government is doing in this space. We feel that it is highly important –

David Davis: Public interest.

Melina BATH: Absolutely, and no more so than for the people in my Eastern Victoria electorate. We are putting on record the need to have that in the public domain.

If we look at the gas and electricity supplies document – again, the government has its *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, a highly unrealistic road map – we need to see the details contained within this document. Again, the most important issue is about keeping the lights on – keeping electricity pumping through our transmission lines into peoples' homes and into hospitals – and keeping the wheels turning. Gas is a critical issue, and it is a critical issue in the transmission to renewables in the landscape. It is not likely that we can just switch off these coal-fired power plants without having that whole pipeline –

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, given previous rulings on this matter, I would ask that you bring the member back to the substance of what Mr Davis has described as a relatively narrow-cast motion.

David Davis: On the point of order, Acting President, it is narrow. Members are entitled to explain the documents that are being sought and the importance of those documents, why it is in the public interest for those documents to be available and importantly why the standing orders may show that they should be provided.

Harriet Shing: So now it is about subject matter, is it? We can go into that?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! In fairness, I am not going to uphold the point of order, because really there are two references to energy here and I think Ms Bath is entitled to go down that avenue should she wish.

Melina BATH: Thank you, Acting President. We looked towards the redevelopment of the high-rise public housing sites on 15 November 2023, and indeed we just saw a motion before the house, which passed, for an inquiry into this very important subject. Therefore providing those additional documents into the public domain of course has relevance. It is very much relevant to those people who are about to undergo enormous change and relocation and have concerns.

If we look at the kangaroo harvest management plan, we know that the previous management plan, from 2021 to 2023, expired at the end of last year. We want to understand what that management plan is. Where is it? What does it look like? We know certainly that primary producers have the right to continue to work producing the very best agricultural products that they can in this state. We know that there needs to be a balance around kangaroo culling and management of kangaroos but also production of agricultural products. We need to see and understand what this document means.

If we go to the Port of Hastings application for offshore wind turbine facilities, we see very clearly this is of a highly important nature, because we know that this state government has been blocked through the federal government in relation to the Port of Hastings. Critically, even the government's own media releases speak to the importance of the Port of Hastings as a renewable energy terminal in order to get those, I think it is, 2 gigawatts of energy and electricity within this system. These are really important plans that need to be unpacked, and we need to work collectively on them to solve the energy crisis that is before us in this state.

If we also, finally, go to the other points of interest and look at that Commonwealth infrastructure review, again there are critical issues. There are critical pieces of infrastructure that need to be unpacked and dealt with. We see time and again that this government is ploughing on into infrastructure that may well not serve our Victorian population going forward. Part (3) of this documents motion also looks at affirming the right of the Council to require the production of documents. We do have this right. It is important that we as the house of review continue to delve into and support that transparency. I will certainly be supporting Mr Davis in his motion today, and I urge all the rest of the crossbench to do the same.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:35): I rise today to speak on the motion which has been put to us by the erstwhile member of the Liberal leadership team, Mr Davis. As I start, I would actually like to pick up on something that Ms Bath said in a rather extraordinary attack on Minister Blandthorn. I am sure Ms Bath knows all too well that she completely misrepresented Minister Blandthorn. That is not what was said. In fact the point that I understand Minister Blandthorn was making was that she was emphasising not the importance of the things that this opposition could be looking at but the importance of the things that this government is looking at. So it was completely inappropriate. As Minister Shing referenced in her point of order, it is something that is more appropriate for a substantive motion if she seeks to do that. I look forward to seeing whether she will. I am sure she probably will not because she knows that Minister Blandthorn did not say what she alleges.

But it does prompt me to pick up on something that Minister Blandthorn was discussing before, which was the extraordinary admission through interjection that apparently this was not put through the entire Liberal leadership team. Now, absolutely putting Ms Crozier to one side – we know she was absent last week – it is quite extraordinary if you are not going to consult with, I do not know, Mr Mulholland, who is a member of the Liberal leadership team in this place –

Harriet Shing: Who would know these days?

Michael GALEA: Who would know these days indeed, Minister Shing? I am not sure if even Mr Pesutto himself knows, because he was last seen running away from people in the parliamentary precinct who were trying to give him a summons – running into lifts or running out of lifts. I am not sure if anyone can find Mr Pesutto, so that perhaps explains why Mr Davis did not consult with his party leader Mr Pesutto – that is, if he did not. I am not entirely clear if he did or did not, but if he did not, perhaps it is because Mr Pesutto was running away, like he is wont to do. Again, a very, very shoddy performance that we are seeing from those opposite. And to pick up on something that Minister Blandthorn raised as well, which is extraordinary in light of the fact that in the 57th Parliament, when those opposite were last in power – and Mr Davis will no doubt recollect this; he was one of them; he in fact I think is the only one of those benches who was here in that period, unless I am mistaken –

A member: He's not going anywhere any time soon.

Michael GALEA: He is not going anywhere, and we are all the better for it. But he would know better than anyone else that 50 per cent of all documents motions that were passed in this place in that term of Parliament were completely ignored – not responded to with a delay or a justification or a claim of executive privilege. Fifty per cent were completely ignored. That is quite different from a government coming into this place and explaining that something is currently subject to executive privilege. Now, without delving into the McMullan principle and the importance of executive privilege, that is a valid consideration of government, especially things that are subject to cabinet consideration. It is a longstanding tradition of Westminster parliaments, in relation to which as well, as sometimes needs to be the case, where the government comes back to this place and says, with a justification, that it does need more time. That is completely different from outright ignoring, which is what happened when Mr Davis, when he was a minister, was part of a government that did.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: It is unclear as well from Mr Davis's interjections whether this is a wideranging or a very narrow motion, and based on the previous contribution by Ms Bath I think one would have to conclude it is quite wideranging. But it does, as Mr Davis says, go to leadership. And again, as I say, and as Minister Blandthorn says as well, there are more paragraphs in this motion than there are current members of the Liberal Party who support Mr Pesutto's leadership. That is what we were led to believe over the weekend. Again, if Mr Pesutto is still leader by this time today, this time tomorrow or this time next week, perhaps you could enlighten us now, Mr Davis?

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, this is territory that we have been in before. We have got a member straying well, well, well outside the form of the motion.

Harriet Shing: On the point of order, Acting President, first we heard Mr Davis say it was narrowcast, then we heard Mr Davis say it should be broad-ranging because it had some nexus to the subject matter of the motion, and now we are back to narrowcast. Where there is a link – and there is at points (3) and (4) of the motion itself – the member is well within his rights to be canvassing the subject that he is in the process of doing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): I will actually uphold the point of order, because I do not really think the opposition leader is really relevant to this motion. If the member could just continue at least roughly down the path of the motion, that would be awesome.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Acting President. Yes, he is certainly not relevant to many in this place – not many across there indeed.

I will pick up on one thing as well that was said before, again talking within the broad confines of this motion, and that was Ms Crozier's remarks about medically safe injecting rooms. I am frankly quite horrified by those remarks. We have lots of debates and cut and thrust in this place, but I was genuinely quite horrified by the flippant way in which those opposite regard our healthcare workers and the workers in that centre as well, as inferred in response to Mr Batchelor's interjection about the I think

63 people whose lives have been saved in this medically safe injecting centre. It does not sound like that is of interest to Ms Crozier, frankly, by dismissing it and saying, ‘Anyone can crank someone’s airways open. Is that what you call saving a life?’ That is an appalling way to enter into this debate. I do not care whether you are a former nurse or not, that is an appalling thing to say, an appalling way to talk about firstly those healthcare workers, who do remarkable work day in and day out, but also the people who are going through that very difficult situation when they are facing the need for that care. I think if that is the approach that you are taking, it is remarkably appalling, particularly from someone who professes to be a former nurse. We all know about the walking across picket lines and everything else that Ms Crozier used to do, but that is quite an extraordinary broadside against people. To flippantly regard saving someone’s life in a medically safe injecting room as being no different to someone cranking someone’s jaw open is absolutely appalling – and it is typical of those opposite.

Ms Crozier is of course on the Liberal leadership team along with Mr Mulholland, and frankly that makes it even worse – for the Liberal leadership to be actually saying this. Without straying too far away, I would like to know if Mr Pesutto endorses those comments. Does he endorse that, and does he support the medically safe injecting room in North Richmond? The remarks, as I say, quite frankly are shocking, not befitting of anyone in the chamber, let alone anyone who claims to hold a leadership position. I could talk all day about the pantomime of leadership in that party – and we know that you are held together just about as well as a rusty Daewoo – but it is absolutely beyond measure to say that.

I will again note this is in relation to the many documents which are being responded to: there are various claims of executive privilege. There are some reasonable delays, which have been explained to this place, but they stand in stark contrast to a party which when they were last in government completely ignored 50 per cent of all documents motions that were put through this place and which also left 1174 questions without notice not responded to. To come in here now and talk about openness and transparency is quite frankly remarkable from you lot, especially in light of, again, the east–west link, as Minister Shing referred to, signing us up to a dodgy contract just before the election, with a poison pill and with a remarkably infantile business case that you fought at all costs against having released. We now know why as well – 30-point font dot points. It is quite remarkable indeed – because we know that is what those opposite are all about. It is all about the stunts. It is all about the theatrics. But when it comes down to it, there is no substance, there is no plan for Victoria and there is no willingness to engage in debate either. That is why, amongst many other reasons, I will not be supporting the motion today. Aside from that, the extraordinary measure of going straight to the first option – I know you have watered it down now, under considerable pressure – of a suspension, rather than taking it through the proper process, just shows the cavalier and reckless attitude which you take in this place, so I do not commend this motion.

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (16:45): I rise to speak in support of the opposition’s motion calling on the government to comply with the previous orders of this house and the standing orders and produce documents. The motion lists seven requests for documents made by this house to the current Labor government that have been ignored. It has become routine for this government to ignore such motions. But it should not be, and as other jurisdictions demonstrate, it does not have to be. The documents motions referred to in the motion we are debating are from different members of this place from all sides of the political spectrum and in respect of a variety of important matters. It is not a partisan motion or specific to any issue, rather one about whether the government of the day is complying with the rules of this chamber and, perhaps more importantly, the democratic principles of representative democracy and responsible government.

Our form of representative democracy, which was hard fought for over hundreds of years, has at its heart the notion that the Crown, or in today’s understanding the executive government, is subject to the Parliament, which in turn is representative of the people. Representative democracy and responsible government are not simply theoretical or esoteric principles but are ones with practical application to the operation of the Parliament and the behaviour of the executive. In 1998 the High

Court of Australia recognised specifically its application in a case related to the New South Wales Parliament and its right to request and receive documents from the executive. To quote from the High Court in this case:

Under the system of responsible government, those Ministers are responsible to the Parliament. For that system to work effectively, for the Administration to retain the confidence of the Parliament, the Houses of Parliament must have access to information relating to public affairs and public finance which is in the possession of the government of the day.

In respect of this recognition by the High Court the executive of the day in the New South Wales Legislative Council now respects and follows its almost identical standing orders to Victoria's in relation to the production of documents – meaning, unfortunately, Victoria is once again the national laggard on matters of government integrity and parliamentary standards.

Yesterday in a briefing organised by the Centre for Public Integrity, Dr Simon Longstaff, one of Australia's leading ethicists, argued, and I am paraphrasing, that all members of Parliament have an obligation to protect the legitimacy of democracy itself. That is what this motion is getting at. He also characterised the government's refusal to comply with the standing orders and requests for documents as an ethical failure on behalf of the government. His point was that just because it has become routine for the government to ignore the Parliament does not mean it is right or ethical.

As I noted previously, Victoria has the unenviable claim of being the least democratic Parliament in the country and quite possibly in the Westminster system globally. In large part this is due to a culture developed over successive governments of treating the Parliament with contempt. But regardless of the history of how this culture in Victoria developed, it is incumbent on today's government and this executive to start respecting the Parliament and the people of Victoria, because it is this Allan Labor government that currently refuses to comply with standing order 10.02(1) when it comes to claiming executive privilege over documents.

For the record, it is perfectly legitimate for a government to claim executive privilege, and there are numerous good reasons why a document should not be made public, particularly as it goes to cabinet deliberations. But in Victoria the government and executive have decided that they will be the sole arbiter of their claims to their own executive privilege, which under any understanding of accountability makes a nonsense of the standing orders. Standing order 10.02(1) requires the government, when claiming executive privilege, to provide the documents to the Clerk. We understand that no Victorian government has ever complied with this rule, and therefore no arbiter has ever been appointed to determine claims of executive privilege. In New South Wales they have similar standing orders, and they work well. Last year, from 26 orders for documents, nine resulted in an arbiter report. The difference between New South Wales and Victoria is not in the rules but in the culture: an executive which respects the role of the Parliament versus one who does not. I should add that this respect in New South Wales is apparent whether the government of the day is a Liberal or a Labor government.

We are pleased the opposition revised the motion to bring back a debate on the suspension of the Leader of the Government in this house when the house resumes in May. Suspending a member, even for a short period, is a serious matter, and it was a step that we were not prepared to support today. However, it is also a very serious matter to breach the standing orders and defy the will of the house, for the reasons I have outlined. We sincerely hope the government heeds the call from this motion, produces the relevant documents and lives up to the notion of good government in both the applied principle established by the High Court and the literal meaning of the expression. If not, we will be forced to explore further mechanisms to reinstate the primacy of the Parliament over the executive and protect Victoria's representative democracy, as it is I believe incumbent on all of us elected to this place to do so. We commend this motion.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (16:50): I make a short contribution to this motion. This motion broadly has two parts, parts (1) to (6) and part (7). Parts (1) to (6) are fairly straightforward; the government has not produced a number of documents that it is meant to, and this is a problem.

Well, clearly this is a problem, and I wish to have my support for parts (1) to (6) noted. Part (7) is where I may have an issue, and hopefully it is an issue that we never have. I was here when Mr Jennings was suspended for six months. I did not vote for it, and I will not vote to deprive any representative of the people of being in this house. Whilst I support this motion, I implore the government – they have the opportunity – to sort this out between now and whenever in April it is. Should that not happen, we should work on another sanction that does not involve removing a member of this Parliament from the house even for a short time.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:52): I rise to speak also in support of the motion. Hubris is what has brought us here, and it is quite a list that the government have managed to collect over this small period of time. In fact it is no surprise that today, just as we finished another debate in respect of housing transparency and the figures around what has occurred and what has not occurred, of course belatedly the government came to us and certainly some of the crossbenchers offering to share documents and share things that we have had to otherwise seek to acquire through formal means.

I do not know what it is about the current government or their state that they suddenly feel that everything they have to do has to be done with a veil of secrecy. I have seen this over the course of this state's history afflict many governments, and this government seems to be severely afflicted, with seemingly no medical diagnosis and certainly no treatment available to them at the moment. I feel some sympathy for the government because clearly they are sick. They are sick because they cannot do what is right, and it is a threat to democracy. When you want to act behind the shadows, when you want to conceal what it is you are doing, then the public have every right to ask why. They have every right to understand what is being done in their name. They have every right to understand what is being done with their money.

We have quite an impressive list here of documents that were sought and have been routinely denied and routinely ignored. What is concerning about this is it is not just a one-off. It is a pattern of systemic behaviour, and ultimately this kind of behaviour is the kind of behaviour that leads to corrupt practice. Now, I would hate for that to be the case, but how do we know that that is not the case when you simply cannot see what is occurring with the decision-makers of this state? It is that serious. It really is serious, and it goes for all sides of politics. I have long grappled with this issue myself, but I cannot understand why. At some point when you are spending public money, the public have every right to know what the contracts are. They have every right to know what is being spent. In my view, frankly, it should not last more than 12 months. In 12 months time, things change and businesses change.

If you are spending the public money, the public have every right to know every single detail about the contract that is being signed, and that goes for every one of your big builds – or big cons, as we like to call them these days. The big house con is the biggest con of all, although it has got a couple of competitors for that. We have got the Commonwealth Games con, we have got the –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: You are building houses – how many houses are you building? I am glad you have interrupted me there because that is a beautiful segue, houses. Let us talk about houses. If you want to talk about houses, I am happy to talk about houses – not that this is part of the motion. I am bringing up an interjection. It is a long-held position of this house that members have certain leeway when they are interjected upon. What I understand is that there are 221 homes. That is the total gain in public housing owned by this government. What a disgraceful position – the billions and billions of dollars. Now, Minister, I do not blame you necessarily yet. I am going to give you a pass today. I am in a generous mood. I do not know why – something has got into me. It could be all the lollies I have been taking, it could be the haircut, it could be any one of those things, but I am going to give you a pass. Admittedly, that last Premier of ours had a brain fart and suddenly thought, 'Here's an idea: let's destroy 44 commission tower buildings. Let's do that. Let's tear them all down.' It is one of the single greatest acts of environmental vandalism writ large upon this state. I cannot even begin to imagine the

tonnes and tonnes of concrete, the tonnes and tonnes of steel – all of those things, done with an absolute lack of transparency. Not once in the debate in this house has anyone actually offered any evidence that this is what had to happen – not once. So I welcome the interjection to talk about housing for just a moment, because we might have run out of time a little bit earlier today. I am conscious of the time, and I have probably taken more than my allotted time.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Mr McGowan to continue without assistance.

Nick McGOWAN: I will bring my remarks to a close. These are serious matters. They do not just pertain to housing, although housing I think we have addressed in some good measure today, thanks to the crossbench and the Liberal Party, who are proudly forging forward and ensuring that the people of Victoria do receive answers and they do receive transparency over documents. I support this motion wholeheartedly.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:56): I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion. I am disappointed that the mover of the motion is not in the chamber to continue his participation in scope hokey-pokey, where we did not know whether this was a broad motion or a narrow motion, depending on who was speaking on it, but what we do know –

Members interjecting.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Here we go; he is back. What we do know about the motion that Mr Davis moved before us is that he had to change it because his original motion was so far from being acceptable to anyone in the chamber.

His original motion, which he moved on 7 March, gave notice on that sitting day of a motion that had many similar features to the motion we are debating today but was not the same as the motion we are debating today, in particular because he sought in the motion that he had moved in this chamber to originally just suspend the Leader of the Government forthwith without the consideration of the matters that have been debated today. Over the course of the last couple of weeks this cunning plan that Mr Davis had concocted hung around his neck like a bit of an albatross. He was forced, in an attempt to actually get people to potentially vote for the motion, to amend it at the last minute, which he did yesterday afternoon. For the last couple of weeks members of this chamber have been thinking that we were going to be debating a particular motion from Mr Davis, and the substance of that has changed pretty dramatically in the last 24 hours. So that is just an observation about how considered and thought through this motion really is, such that in the space of a couple of weeks it has had to change pretty dramatically.

The second thing I wanted to get to was just a bit of detail about the kinds of materials the documents motions that have been passed by this chamber are seeking to get. We have had in the course of debate since the standing orders were changed by the chamber last year a series of motions that have sought to require the Leader of the Government – and it was not just, as some of the contributions that were made by Mr McGowan suggested, that they were really only after the contracts. These are just some examples of the content of the motions that have been moved and are being sought. In respect to the motion on the review of the application by the Port of Hastings for offshore wind turbine facilities, which was moved on 7 February, that sought all correspondence associated with consultation with respect to that proposal – not just the submissions that were being made to the federal government but all correspondence relating to consultation with respect to that proposal. It asked for that entire cache of emails, presumably, to be delivered to this chamber within three weeks. That is just one example of the material that is being requested in these documents motions, an exercise that is so rightly defended – so fervently defended – by those opposite.

In the drafting of that they are placing a request to the government to provide materials that, just on the face of the motions themselves, are exceedingly voluminous. Then they have the temerity to come in with a motion just weeks later and say if this is not complied with in full – if all of the emails with stakeholders about a pretty significant commercial project, as one example, or all of the submissions received in a review are not provided in full – then we will initiate the suspension of the Leader of the Government. That is making a mockery of the obligations that this chamber has to exercise the very considered and substantial authority that is vested in it by both the nature of the statutes that set up the self-government arrangements in the colony of Victoria back in the mid 19th century and the Council's powers to compel the production of documents over time. It is seeking such volumes of material – seeking that all correspondence and all emails associated with an extensive stakeholder consultation period be produced within three weeks – like that is somehow the responsible exercise of a very significant and important function of this chamber. I think that just demonstrates the seriousness, or lack thereof, with which those opposite take these matters. If they were actually interested in the substance of the issues that we are debating, then they would be a lot more thoughtful and considered in the motions that they draft and bring in to the chamber – but they are not. Whatever the motivation, whatever the genesis of these motions –

Nick McGowan: Accountability. Democracy.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Maybe it is. I hope it is. I hope that they have noble goals, because exercising the functions of this chamber should be done with seriousness, particularly when the stated and requested consequence of noncompliance is, as Mr Bourman said in his contribution, a very significant one of denying an elected representative their ability to participate in this chamber and denying members of this chamber the opportunity to hold them accountable for the exercise of their executive functions through its operations.

This is a serious thing, and people should take it seriously. The level of detail that is being sought in this motion, three weeks for all correspondence relating to a stakeholder consultation period, is not taking this mechanism seriously, and it is certainly not taking this debate seriously. What we have seen with the reading in of this motion by Mr Davis on 7 March and in getting to this point today, where he has had to substantially change the motion because it was not good enough in the first place – it was a pretty sloppy effort – again is the need for Mr Davis to change his approach, because he has done something that he probably over-egged a little bit, on the first point. What we want to see is the ability for this chamber to think about how it exercises these exceptionally important powers and to do so in a way that does not require the government to produce ridiculous amounts of correspondence back and forth – emails, whatever – in ridiculously short periods of time. These are important issues, and they should be taken seriously.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:06): I rise to speak on the motion. Our system of government cannot function without the adherence to democratic principles. We all know that. Some of those are the obvious ones – freedom of speech, equality before the law et cetera – but there are more subtle ones that go along with these democratic conventions that it is our duty here to observe. Accountability within government is one, and accountable government is only upheld as a principle if conventions on transparency are observed and honoured. Today we have a government that has no respect for such values and operates with impunity for its breaches. It is reflected in a government that will describe adverse findings as 'educational', that will allow ministerial failings to be walked by, and here it is the systematic failure to provide documents via procedural obfuscation. The standard you walk by is the standard you accept, and we – and I am talking to all corners of this chamber – cannot take this path. The government must take pause and reflect and take the proper action.

Here I get to use a phrase I never thought I would have the opportunity to use. It might be akin to mentioning the Scottish play. But to listen to the intellectual gymnastics over there defending it, methinks thou doth protest too much. The proper action is to respect parliamentary process and conventions that we all rely on. Do not walk past. Do not be party to degrading our democracy, because if this becomes accepted practice, none of us can do our job properly – none of us – and we cannot

serve our community. The government should make good and correct accounting of the obligations to this chamber and to the voters we all represent. They should release these papers. I endorse this motion.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:08): I will be brief in summing up. This is a very important motion, as a number of members have clearly stated, and I thank those who have supported the motion. They clearly stated that this motion needs to be taken very seriously. It is a serious motion. It has been carefully thought through. It has been negotiated with many on the crossbench. There have been discussions over a long period of time. It is critical to get to a point where we can actually reinforce the powers of the chamber for the good of the community. This is about accountability. It is about democracy. The government is intent on thumbing its nose at democracy.

Some over there have said they have not had enough time. One of these motions was moved on 20 March last year. The idea that there was not time for the government to respond to that motion – I mean, honestly, it is sad and depressing that the government response has been that sort of response when actually they have had 12 months and will have another month now to respond. What I would say is that on 30 April the best way forward would be for the government to simply provide the documents and in that interim period provide the Lay report to the Clerk, and the Clerk will institute the process that is laid out in the standing orders. As Dr Ratnam said, and I thank her for her support and the party's support on this, that set of standing orders has not been employed, and this is an opportunity to have a fair arbitral process.

If the government has got a strong claim of executive privilege, it should be able to be tested. There is legal opinion about this. There are legal cases, as we know through the Egan case and elsewhere, where documents have been tested in this way. There is actually some case law which should assist an arbiter to make reasonable, grounded, plausible decisions and do so in a way that does not compromise a government document. That is what happens in New South Wales, and there is no reason at all in the world why it cannot happen in Victoria as well.

Equally, the other documents that are listed here, the tranches of documents that have been held back by the government, with some of them it is very clear that they are doing this wilfully because they think they can get away with it. They think they can thumb their nose at the Parliament, thumb their nose at democracy, thumb their nose at accountability. I say that is wrong. I say we have got to have a fair way forward. We have devised, I think, a fair way forward. The government will have the opportunity on 30 April to table those documents – or before, preferably clearly before, much before, but if not, some of them on 30 April – and then the last part of the motion will be entirely unnecessary. That is my preferred way forward. If we do need to come to the last part of the motion, which is to commence a motion to impose a sanction on the Leader of the Government, I indicate now that I will talk with each and every member of the crossbench about the way forward there. We need to find a way that we can all agree on where we impose a modest, clear and fair sanction on the Leader of the Government who has chosen not to comply with these important orders.

Remember too that these orders have been made for the benefit of the community. It is in the public interest that these documents are released. If I just pick one – the gas plan – we know that the Australian Energy Market Operator is about to release very significant gas documents or predictions about the future of gas and the reliability of supply, in the next day or so. That set of documents will help immensely in assessing Victoria's future, this set of documents that the orders seek. The gas substitution plan is obviously very impactful on the community, and we want to see the government's modelling and how they have arrived at some of these policy solutions. So that is just an example of one of these motions and the importance of that motion. It is in the public interest. The chamber has the power to direct that these documents be provided and it has the right to impose sanctions if necessary. I hope that it is not necessary, and I hope the government takes the opportunity to provide these documents to the chamber and the community.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (22): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Adem Somyurek, Richard Welch

Noes (14): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney

Motion agreed to.*Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Department of Treasury and Finance***Budget papers 2022–23*

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:20): I rise to speak on the state budget for 2022–23 and the budget for road maintenance in this state. Road maintenance in this state is in an appalling condition, and that is because we have seen the budget cut from \$870 million to just \$442 million since 2020–21. In fact in last year's budget alone there was about a 25 per cent budget cut to road maintenance, and 45 per cent has been cut out of that budget since 2020. This has led to our state's roads being in quite a dangerous condition.

An article in the *Weekly Times* recently speaks about a survey that was conducted by the National Transport Research Organisation. That survey came back to say that 91 per cent of our state's 8400-kilometre network of regional roads was deemed to be in poor or very poor condition. That is appalling – 91 per cent in poor or very poor condition. It went on to say that just 9 per cent of those roads were actually classed as being in fair condition. None of the roads were rated as being in good or very good condition. We all know that the state of the roads leads to road safety issues if they are not maintained. Last year Victoria had a dreadful road toll, with 295 lives being lost on our roads. In my electorate alone in just four accidents there were 18 lives lost: five at the Labuan Road accident just out of Strathmerton, five lost in Daylesford, four in the Mansfield accident and four at Chiltern. That is just four accidents and 18 deaths. That is a shocking, shocking statistic.

We want to see our roads in country Victoria made much safer. We all know that they are not safe at the moment. We drive in dreadful conditions; we dodge potholes everywhere. Country Victorians have two sayings. One is, 'We used to drive on the left of the road, but now we drive on what's left of the road.' The other one is, 'The government require us to have cars that are roadworthy, but the roads are definitely not carworthy.' Instead of actually fixing our roads Labor's solution to these very poor conditions on our roads is just to permanently reduce the speed limits on the roads. For country Victorians who are travelling vast distances to get places this is not a solution. We cannot be driving everywhere at 40 or 60 kilometres per hour. We need decent roads that allow us to travel at a decent speed to get from point A to point B in a decent time.

Victorians are paying the price for Labor's mismanagement with damage to their cars as well. We have seen a 414 per cent increase in claims by drivers for damage to their vehicles on the roads in the last three years. This just shows you how many additional cars are being damaged because of the condition of the roads. We know that Labor cannot manage money, and we know that Labor cannot manage projects; Labor cannot manage our roads either. Victorians are paying the price for the mismanagement of this Labor government, which is seriously incompetent when it comes to every level of government, whether it is financial mismanagement, whether it is project mismanagement or whether it is roads and maintenance mismanagement. This government has a gold star in mismanagement.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action*Victorian Renewable Energy Target 2022–23 Progress Report*

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:25): I rise today to update the house on the *Victorian Renewable Energy Target Progress Report 2022–23*, tabled in October of last year. I want to start by thanking the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action for compiling this report, their continued good work in supporting government and their continued commitment to providing Victorians with the power that they need.

As I gladly update the house on the renewable energy sector's continued growth and development despite the challenges in the global environment, it is worth noting that Victoria's renewable energy generation has reached 37.8 per cent of Victoria's electricity generation, and that is double what we generated five years ago. This increase continues to form the foundation on which we strive toward our next target of 40 per cent renewable electricity generation by 2025. That is the very nature of this government: to our core we set targets, we meet targets and we get things done. We are continuing to do the work that Victorians elected us to do, to make decisive climate action and to deliver a robust energy grid that will drive down energy prices. These targets will be critical in leading Victoria through an accelerated renewable energy transition, which continued at pace this year with the commissioning of new capacity and commencement of construction at 11 new large-scale renewable energy projects right across the state.

Achieving these goals and storage targets is estimated to bring forward around \$9.5 billion in economic development and around 59,000 two-year jobs over the period until 2035. We continued to support investment in Victoria's energy infrastructure needs, as stated in this report, with the announcement of six successful projects in our second Victorian renewable energy target auction. These VRET auction projects will bring forward a combined 623 megawatts of new renewable energy capacity and 365 megawatts of energy storage.

We have continued with the rollout of our nation-leading Solar Homes program to reduce emissions and help Victorians save on their energy bills. Over the 2022–23 financial year the Solar Homes program supported more than 37,400 Victorians to install new rooftop photovoltaics with a capacity of 274 kilowatts, while the Solar for Business program supported 1385 small and mid-size Victorian businesses to install a further 23 megawatts of capacity. There is so much more to say, but it is worth noting that since its inception in 2018 the Solar Homes program has now supported more than 270,000 households and installed more than 1600 megawatts of capacity.

At a more local level the Victorian government committed to installing 100 neighbourhood batteries across the state, and I was pleased to join the Minister for Energy and Resources and the member for Bass, both in the other place, to announce the first-round recipients of the battery program. So thank you for the invitation, minister and the member down there, to join you for what was a really historic occasion. We announced there the largest battery in the first round, which is the Mondo Phillip Island battery, delivering 1750 kilowatt-hours of storage to the island and the surrounding towns around Phillip Island.

The Allan Labor government remains committed to working with communities to deliver the energy infrastructure that was promised when elected to keep the lights on during outages and to drive down energy prices. With this report that I am speaking to today, I would like to recognise and celebrate the achievements of our renewable energy sector as we continue to meet our renewable energy and emission reduction targets.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office*Withdrawal from 2026 Commonwealth Games*

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:29): I would like to rise and speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report *Withdrawal from 2026 Commonwealth Games*, which has been

dropped on our tables today, March 2024. It is no shock to me that the findings that have come back are that the games cost Victoria over \$589 million, with no discernible benefit. It is no shock to me – I am one of the members on the Commonwealth Games inquiry in the upper house – that the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions business case for the games was inadequate to support any informed decision by the government on the likely costs and benefits of hosting. It is no shock to me that there was no consultation with the regional councils that control most of the venues that would be required for the games, and I am quoting from this report.

I might put on record that from listening and asking questions at these hearings in Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo – we had a representative from the Shepparton shire council at our Bendigo hearing – and last week in the Latrobe Valley, no-one had been consulted. This is absolutely correct: there was no consultation with the regional councils that control most of these venues. Post it is consul-told, yes; consulted, no.

Let me point out some things that were absolutely heartbreaking to listen to from one of the businesspeople from last week. Her name is Katie Reardon. She is from Farnham Court, and she spoke with such passion and such distress. The night before the Commonwealth Games was cancelled they had just secured, on a one-page document, an agreement with Team England to host Team England at Farnham Court. Thirty-three rooms – they were going to triple their workforce. She said they had been so excited about it. I wrote extensive notes: ‘We were gutted by COVID for so long. It has gutted us. No guests for such a long time – the only guests were emergency services. We’d renovated the motel over a period of time.’ And then she said: ‘My background is in events. We were shattered, and no-one could believe it. It was a kick in the guts for Morwell. Morwell gets avoided like the plague’ – these are her words I took – ‘and Morwell was to be the star.’ She went on to say of the excitement: ‘Everyone was to win in our town, and this legacy is missing. It is missing from our town. In a heartbeat it was given to us; in a heartbeat it was taken away.’ She said: ‘I want to hear what you’ – the Labor government – ‘are going to do for Morwell.’ They closed the deal a few hours before the Premier stood up and said it was a no-go. She went on to talk about her passion for the town of Morwell and their need. It is no shock to those people in the Latrobe Valley that there was a total lack of consultation.

We heard from a very dear gentlemen in Mr Garry Silvester from the badminton club. He was visibly emotional about the impact and the toll that the cancellation took on him. There are over 200 young people he coaches and trains in badminton in the Latrobe Valley with such passion and dedication. It was palpable, his disappointment. Do you know what he said? I asked him what he needs from that. He has not had communication with Sport and Recreation Victoria, from the minister or from this government about what his legacy will be. There is a new building called the Gippsland Regional Indoor Sports Stadium that is largely used for basketball – they have to put tape down on the lines for about 20 hours before they hold an event and then rip it up again. He is passionate about supporting young people into positive sport and the whole breadth of the way that sport can transform lives and connect people and give them health and wellbeing.

What did we see the other day? We saw this government in damage control when the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events came down to the valley. He did not promise Mr Silvester anything for the badminton fraternity in that area. He did not promise that. It was damage control by the truth serum that these people came to this inquiry. I took notes. Going back to the VAGO report, this solidifies it very much so. The contents of this VAGO report was evident in that testimony last week.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

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

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:35): I rise tonight to speak on a joint committee report tabled today, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s financial and performance outcomes report. PAEC has an important role to play in monitoring the state budget, and the state budget is something which rightly is of interest to all members here. It is what leads me to welcome the news from the Commonwealth Grants Commission last week that Victoria will be getting

more of a fair share of the GST revenue which this state generates. The horizontal fiscal equalisation model is the process by which the GST rate in wealthier states, such as Victoria and New South Wales, is partially redistributed to poorer states. For almost 100 years the CGC has operated in such a way to distribute funds across the country, a role which expanded upon the implementation of the GST. Currently for every dollar Victoria spends, we receive just 85 cents back. That is a shortfall of more than \$4 billion each year that we are subsidising other states, so I welcome the recent determination by the CGC that it will lift up that rate to 97 cents back in the dollar returned for every dollar spent here.

From the start of the millennium to 2018, through the CGC and the GST redistribution Victoria has been a generous benefactor to the tune of \$24.132 billion to other states. In that period, this state contributed 24.9 per cent of GST revenue, yet received just 22.4 per cent back from the GST pool. This year will see an extra \$3.68 billion, but it is still a shortfall. There are limited ways in which states can raise their own revenue outside of the federal structure, and even less ways they can do so progressively. Victoria is also in a unique situation compared with other states, especially when it comes to mining royalties which states earn, which per person works out to being \$48 in Victoria and \$1379 nationwide. In light of this determination, New South Wales threw their toys out of the pram, attacking Victoria in the process as a welfare state. This is an assertion that is as bizarre as it is flagrantly wrong, as even under this new determination Victoria is still being short-changed by hundreds of millions of dollars a year compared to the revenue that we bring in. In this determination, Queensland are now switching from being a GST beneficiary to a GST contributor, and this is despite any federal payments towards the Brisbane Olympics being specifically excluded from consideration as per the directives the CGC received ahead of this year's determination. We know that WA have demanded special treatment, as their share back of GST has plummeted in light of their mining boom, but I do not recall that state complaining all too much throughout the 20th century when they were the beneficiaries of Commonwealth Grants Commission largesse.

The federal government has sought to stopgap this by the no-worse-off guarantee, which this year is pumping \$6.2 billion towards WA, a state which is already in a fortuitous situation courtesy of those aforementioned mining royalties. The no-worse-off guarantee is also benefiting Victoria, although it is after all a temporary measure. Federal spending decisions are ultimately a matter for the federal government, and we know that over the past decade Victoria has received well under its share of federal infrastructure funding, largely attributable to the former Morrison government. In the near term, the no-worse-off guarantee needs to be made permanent. Further reform should be considered to ensure that the states that are leading our nation's economy, such as Victoria, are not penalised for their success. It is time for us to have a discussion about Victoria getting its fair share of GST revenue: not 85 per cent, not 97 per cent, but 100 per cent.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Withdrawal from 2026 Commonwealth Games

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to speak to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report that was tabled today, the *Withdrawal from the 2026 Commonwealth Games*. This is a damning report, and it is a report that we certainly were anticipating and looking forward to reading, but I do not think the Victorian community would be. They would be very concerned about the findings in this report. As we suspected, there are many issues that the government needs to answer, and in particular it is the Premier that needs to answer what on earth went on under her watch as the minister responsible. It is a damning report. It has confirmed the true cost and the political nature of this entire debacle.

Let us not forget that when this announcement was made, it ricocheted around the world. Our reputation has been severely damaged because of the government's decision and what went on. What we do know – what the report has found – is that it is going to cost Victorian taxpayers in excess of \$589 million. I do not think we have seen the end of that massive cost. I mean, this is just an

extraordinary amount of money. The report claims the \$6.9 billion of costings to withdraw from the games were overstated and not transparent and double counted the cost. Now, I want to go to that point, because that in itself is really very concerning.

Key finding 4 says:

... The original Games budget was unrealistically low, but the final estimated cost of \$6.9 billion was overstated ...

It goes on to explain why:

The figure is overstated because it double counts costs relating to industrial relation risks and cost escalation risks.

The \$6.9 billion included:

- a \$1 billion contingency allowance, including \$551 million of estimates for individual cost items and a project-wide contingency provision of \$450 million
- \$2 billion for additional cost pressures primarily relating to industrial relation risk and cost escalation risks.

That is that \$3.6 billion that on 20 April 2023 the then Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, now the Premier, Jacinta Allan, agreed to, a revised gross budget for the Commonwealth Games of \$3.6 billion – those figures I have just read out. On 16 May the then minister now Premier told Parliament:

... we are committed to delivering the Commonwealth Games with that \$2.6 billion ...

She said it was initially promised to fully fund the event, but just a week later the Victorian budget was released, with the approved \$3.6 billion being hidden in contingency funding. This is a cover-up. It is clearly a cover-up. It is extraordinary what has gone on. The Auditor-General found that the approved \$3.6 billion:

... was not referred to in evidence given to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in its May and June 2023 hearings into the Budget.

Victorians deserve to understand fully what went on. The Auditor-General has done his work, and this is an enormous amount of money – \$3.6 billion that this government was putting into contingency and covering up. I will say it again: they covered up this huge amount of money, billions of dollars of money, taxpayers money. I find it stunning, so I am very pleased that the Auditor-General could put this report out to the public. It goes on to talk about who was giving advice to the government:

... DJSIR advised us that:

- it did not provide the advice that the Games could cost around \$6.9 billion –

they said that –

which the government publicly released. It understands that DPC and DTF prepared this advice

And then the report says:

- DPC and DTF did not consult with DJSIR or seek its advice on the accuracy of the July 2023 cost estimate in the document the government publicly released

This is a cover-up, and that is why the Premier needs to come before the Commonwealth Games inquiry. Stop covering up and tell us the truth.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:44): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Community sport funding

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:44): (794) My adjournment matter this evening is for Minister Spence in her capacity as the Minister for Community Sport. The action that I am seeking is for the minister to provide me with an update on how much funding has been provided to clubs in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region through the 2022–23 sporting club grants program. The sporting club grants program funds Victoria's community sports and active recreation organisations. Access to this funding helps grassroots clubs and organisations address barriers to participation, develop safe and sustainable practices and build social and active local communities. This program assists organisations to acquire uniforms and equipment that are essential for participation, first aid and safety; attract, build the capability of and retain a skilled workforce; increase equity, diversity and inclusiveness; implement good governance practices; increase participation of individuals and communities; create opportunities so that Victorians can participate in ways that suit them; and support athletes in achieving success in their sport at the highest level. Applications for funding for the 2023–24 round close today.

Some of the successful recipients from the previous round include the Berwick Bowling Club, Berwick City Soccer Club, Berwick Cricket Club as well as the Wantirna South Cricket Club. I was very happy to see so many local clubs in the south-east receive funding through the last round of the program. When this year's funding round is finished I also look forward to seeing more successful clubs in my local region. To reiterate, I am seeking an update from the minister on how much funding has been provided to sporting clubs in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region through the 2022–2023 sporting club grants program.

Education system

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:46): (795) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education. Government funding into schools almost doubled between the years of 2012 and 2022. Meanwhile, student learning outcomes have been on the decline. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment, over the last 24 years we have seen declines in the standards of reading, science and mathematics. Students who took the test in the year 2022 were almost a year behind in learning when compared to those who took the test in the year 2000. Students are now 16 months behind in mathematics, over a year behind in reading and 10 months behind in science when compared to students who took the test 24 years ago.

The problem here is not funding, because record funding has not been met with record achievement – in fact the opposite has been true. A 2023 report, *Who Teaches the Teachers? An Audit of Teaching Degrees at Australian Universities*, found that the equivalent of just 10 weeks of classes across a four-year bachelor of education degree are dedicated to teaching core literacy and numeracy skills. It also found that fewer than one in ten teaching subjects focused on literacy and numeracy education. Under the back-to-basics program endorsed by the federal education minister, there will be a new accreditation regime for teaching degrees. It will be mandatory for universities to instruct student teachers in evidence-based reading, science and arithmetic, and classroom management practices. This is a wonderful step, but there is not any clarity on how it will be implemented. So the action that I seek is for the Minister for Education to outline how this will be implemented in the state of Victoria.

Supermarket prices

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:48): (796) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that I seek is for Labor to ensure shoppers can be certain they are not buying price-gouged items. You might have noticed a few extra sales tickets or yellow price stickers at the supermarket recently. Well, amidst all the public pressure and the scrutiny from parliamentary inquiries and the like, the supermarkets Coles and Woolies have announced that they have started actually lowering their prices, albeit temporarily – funny that. Now, we all welcome, I am sure, a lower bill at the check-out, but these announced deals, these price discounts, are temporary. Coles and Woolies will hope that it is enough to quell public unrest, and then they are just going to

jack the prices up again. Not to mention that sometimes the sales tickets are not even discounted at all – they will be the same price or something different.

Shoppers have no way of knowing if we are getting a fair deal. We do not know the mark-up on these prices, or how much the farmers and suppliers are actually getting paid for their products. What we do know is that people are completely at the mercy of the supermarket duopoly, Coles and Woolworths, and their price gouging when it comes to being able to afford food. They set the prices, and they can do whatever they want with something that really should be an essential service. Shoppers would not be in the dark about if they were getting a good deal, and shoppers would not have to go hungry if the Labor government would just treat food as an essential service and stop buck-passing the responsibility solely onto the federal Parliament. It is your responsibility; get on with it.

Maternal and child health services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (17:49): (797) My matter is for the Minister for Health, and it concerns an issue affecting our healthcare system in Victoria – the tragic toll on newborns and mothers due to adverse events and errors in maternity care. The recent data revealed the distressing reality that 36 babies have lost their lives and 19 others have suffered harm, including disability. This demands our immediate attention and decisive action, so the action I seek is for the Minister for Health to conduct a review and provide the actions the government has taken to respond to these alarming statistics on maternal health. The figures obtained from Safer Care Victoria span both public and private healthcare facilities and highlight disturbing trends for infants between 2017 and 2022. The number rose to a record 12 cases, with six deaths, in the first half of 2022 alone. The heart of the matter lies in deteriorating patient conditions or a delay in staff recognising the severity of illness, being a significant factor in 24 cases. The figures indicate a troubling increase, surpassing the total cases in the previous year, raising serious concerns about the safety and quality of maternity care in our state.

We must seek answers and a concrete solution to address these critical issues. I call on the Minister for Health to outline the government's plan of action to tackle the root cause of adverse events in maternal care. The consequences of inaction have been severe. Of the surviving babies, 11 experienced permanent or long-term function loss. We cannot ignore the urgent need to reform our maternity care system to prevent further tragedy. In conclusion, I implore the Minister for Health to provide transparency on the steps the government plans to take in response to these alarming statistics. A commitment to the wellbeing of Victorian families demands nothing less than a thoughtful plan to address the challenges facing maternal care. Let us not falter in our duty to protect the most vulnerable members of our society.

Assisted reproductive treatment services

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:52): (798) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General. Surrogacy provides people with a life-changing opportunity to grow their family. A surrogate graciously agrees to carry and give birth to a child on behalf of another person or couple who are the child's intended family. For many surrogacy is the only option that they have left, and it is an incredibly financially and emotionally taxing experience. This is why it is particularly important that our assisted reproductive treatment laws are well crafted. To this end in 2019 there was an independent review of assisted reproductive treatment in Victoria conducted by Michael Gorton AM. This review consulted widely with stakeholders involved in or impacted by assisted reproductive treatment. It found that the current regulatory framework is no longer fit for purpose and fails to put people at the centre of fertility care. As it stands the access, affordability, quality of care and support do not hold up to what Victorians expect.

Thankfully some of the issues identified in this review have already been responded to in the legislative changes by the Victorian government; however, this review has not been responded to in full. We now risk falling behind other jurisdictions which already have amendments to surrogacy laws before their parliaments. Some recommendations yet to be implemented include removing the demeaning requirement that same-sex couples prove that they are unable to become pregnant to access surrogacy

arrangements; others include expanding the scope of who may provide counselling in respect of surrogacy arrangements, ending the prohibition on the use of surrogates' eggs, streamlining parentage orders and permitting advertising in relation to altruistic surrogacy. Addressing the shortcomings of the existing regulatory framework is essential to ensuring that more Victorians can become parents through surrogacy. Doing so will allow more people to experience the joy of being able to have families of their own. The action I seek is that the Attorney-General bring forward legislation that will implement the recommendations of the independent review of assisted reproductive treatment in Victoria in full.

Wallan road infrastructure

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:54): (799) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I seek the action of the minister to provide an update as to why there is a seemingly permanent 40-kilometre roadwork zone on Watson Street in Wallan. It has been 40 kilometres for five months. Is this because potholes are so bad that the government has just decided it is easier to slow everyone down than to actually fix them? No wonder no work has ever been done or ever been seen to be done, except for filling in existing potholes with sand, which gets washed away with rain.

I want to read into *Hansard* some stories that locals in Wallan have sent me in the hope that the minister might actually finally do something about the pothole crisis in Wallan. Unfortunately, the local Labor MP rarely visits Wallan and refuses to deal with the pothole crisis.

Wallan local Dale Wise says:

The condition of the roads around Wallan are atrocious and even the new section of road on northern highway near the 7/11 is already breaking up.

These roads need to be heavy duty to cater for the high concentration of heavy vehicles using the northern highway to get into northern Victoria using Watson St to access the Fwy.

Bradley Baldwin says:

As a new resident to the area, between the crime, and potholes, what a terrible choice to move here.

Robert Ellul says:

My car tyre exploded shortly after hitting the pothole outside the police station on Watson St.

I am already \$185 out of pocket, and need to take the car to the mechanic to make sure there isn't damage beyond the wheel and tyre.

I note that it has been marked as 'temporarily' 40kph for ... 4 months now, but no action has been taken ... to ... return to 60kph.

Angus Maclean says:

I have lived in Hidden Valley Wallan for just over 10 years having moved to Australia in 2012 with my family from Scotland.

The lack of investment in roads and infrastructure has been shocking. Why are we expected to just put up with the condition of the roads?

I've started to look elsewhere to live and work.

Liz Garraway says:

The Northern Hwy is a corridor ... for hundreds of trucks and the roads in the area should be built to withstand these, as simple pothole repairs get ripped up by the passage of all the truck wheels.

Surely the local Labor MP –

who is not really local to Wallan –

receives the same pleas from locals, but has chosen not to listen. I'm seeking the action of the Minister to provide an update on Watson Street and actually listen to locals and fix the pothole crisis plaguing my community.

Maternal and child health services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:57): (800) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health. Again I raise the issue and the very important aspect around maternal and child health nurses – the issues around screening that have been raised in recent weeks, but also the lack of investment and lack of action by the government.

Back in 2018 this Parliament undertook an inquiry into this very issue, and it found that there were severe workforce shortages. It recommended that the government get on and look at this issue to ensure that there was proper coverage for maternal and child health nurses to be able to undertake the very vital work that they do. Now, we know that through COVID many vulnerable women and their families and their babies missed out on getting those appointments and checks by those experienced nurses.

A few weeks ago the government released their report into perinatal mental health screening approaches. Again it highlighted the issues that are lacking, particularly around mental health checks too. I made this point in question time today around the number of women that are severely affected by mental health aspects. Five years ago the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System identified a need to review the approaches into perinatal mental health screening, and yet we are still here looking at what needs to be done.

The government have released a bit of information after that independent report that they had undertaken, which found one in four people experienced mental ill health throughout the perinatal period and 70 per cent of people who experienced mental ill health before the birth of their child also experienced mental ill health after the birth. I mean, these figures are staggering, and they are really concerning because there are so many of these women missing out. I mean, if they are having that impact – these checks are there to detect problems and to prevent problems from arising. That 70 per cent of people who experienced mental ill health are going to go on and experience it after the birth is very alarming. It goes on to talk about:

There is inconsistent perinatal mental health screening practice across Victoria ...

...

Data from 81 –

maternal and child health services –

... indicates that one in two people are screened at least once after birth using the ... secondary screen postnatally).

This, again, is not good enough.

There are currently no state guidelines for screening during pregnancy, and –

maternal and child health guidelines –

... do not fully align with the national guidelines.

So the question I ask is: what action is the government taking to address those national guidelines and further support this vulnerable cohort?

Rental support

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:00): (801) The action I am seeking is from the Minister for Housing. On Friday I spent the morning speaking to locals in my electorate at Blackburn station about the cost-of-living crisis – these are everyday Victorians commuting to their nine-to-five jobs on the train. These constituents raised concerns, including rental prices, gas prices and electricity prices across Melbourne. Their worries are not unfounded. In metropolitan Melbourne there has been an increase of 15.8 per cent in rental prices in the year to September 2023 and a further 27 per cent in just the last year. Meanwhile the same report, the Homes Victoria rental report, showed

that in my electorate of North-Eastern Metropolitan Region we saw an increase of 17.9 per cent in rental prices across the same period for the region.

Over the last year electricity prices went up 28 per cent and gas prices went up 22 per cent, so families are struggling, they are hurting, and the cost-of-living crisis is a real one in my region. But to exacerbate all of this we have the destructive concept of the Suburban Rail Loop planning to destroy housing in the area long before the replacement property speculation rebuilds new residences, so there can only be further upward pressure on those rentals. So the action I seek from the minister is: can he commit to my constituents that he will be taking action so that rents will come down in this term of government?

Land tax

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:02): (802) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is for the Treasurer to acknowledge that his latest increase to land tax is hurting mum-and-dad investors and driving up the cost of rent, and further I ask that he considers reversing the policy.

Some years ago my constituent Kellie, from Barnawartha, and her husband helped their daughter escape a violent relationship. They could not find a rental property, so they stretched all their resources to buy a second home in Wodonga where their daughter could live. The same housing pressures still exist today, with rental vacancies in the city sitting at below 1 per cent. Six years later their daughter still lives in the home. She has been able to turn her life around and is now in her third year of a nursing degree. Her parents did all they could to help her because that is what parents do, but the government's new land tax is making the situation impossibly difficult. They have been slugged a thousand dollars a year for the next decade by this grubby little money grab.

The justification for this tax was that it would only affect wealthy landholders and those most able to pay, but the Real Estate Institute of Victoria has said that nine out of 10 rentals are mum-and-dad owned properties and that 75 per cent of owners only have that one additional property. People like Kellie are not land barons, they are everyday investors who stretch to make a long-term investment, and now they have become collateral damage in the government's failure to balance the books. Kellie called the tax 'a kick in the guts'. She said:

This is the final straw. I cannot believe this ridiculous and cruel legislation made it through Parliament. My husband and I are so stressed and anxious as we are already stretched on our budget as far as we possibly can.

My colleague the member for Benambra has been meeting with constituents affected by this tax, including Kellie, whose story is repeated across the state. Liz from Browns Plains, about halfway between Wodonga and Rutherglen, has been a residential property investor in Wodonga for almost 12 years. This year she has been hit with a \$975 land tax bill. She has had to increase her tenant's rent and now plans to sell the property at the end of the lease.

At a time when rental vacancies are at historic lows and rents are rising so high that normal people are priced out of the market, it is heartless for this government to be slugging property owners with a land tax that will force them to raise rent. Investors and business owners across the state are deciding to abandon Victoria, not only because of this latest tax grab but also because of the increased regulatory risk associated with conducting business in Victoria.

Albury–Wodonga hospital

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:05): (803) My adjournment is to the Minister for Health in relation to the Albury–Wodonga hospital. In October last year I raised concerns following the release of the master plan, a plan that provided very little detail, such as the number of hospital beds the new hospital would deliver. Four months later, I thank the minister for her response, which referred to consultation with the community and stakeholders that is occurring and essential to the hospital planning design and delivery process. Given the minister's response, I was surprised to discover that

no representatives from the state government attended the Albury–Wodonga regional health summit on 1 March in Wodonga. We heard from the National Rural Health Alliance, the Murray Primary Health Network, the Border Medical Association, the La Trobe Rural Health School, the Border Regional Training Hub, the Rural Doctors Association and the mayor of Wodonga, and it was great to see members of Parliament from the federal and state level from various political backgrounds, except the Labor state government.

It would have been beneficial if the minister or a representative from the Department of Health had been there to hear from various stakeholders who had come together to discuss priorities to improve health outcomes for the Albury–Wodonga region. Locals see the region as one location, socially and economically, but the Murray River means that health services rely on funding from two different states. The catchment area covers a population of 300,000 people and growing, and current health services are not keeping pace. Locals are disappointed that the Labor government announced funding for the single site in Albury without any community consultation and failed to inform the community of the future for the Wodonga hospital and the emergency department.

Albury Wodonga Health is at breaking point. Based on the number of patients, it is the largest regional health service outside of Geelong in Victoria. Every day, sick patients need to be transferred between the two sites, with doctors rushing between. Health infrastructure is out of date, and there are simply not enough rooms to meet the demand, risking patient safety. The long, drawn-out process has been difficult for Victorian staff, who are unsure of what the plans mean for their jobs, patient loads and future. Locals want to see the provision of accessible, timely and equitable health services and are seeking a clear commitment to provide appropriate funding to deliver the health outcomes needed to support their growing region, acknowledging that the current commitment is welcome but inadequate. I ask the minister to provide a written response to the 10 key points identified at the Albury–Wodonga regional health summit, and the action I seek is for the Victorian state government to progress the development of a premier health service for the region and to consult widely with border communities before finalising any decisions.

Gender identity

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:08): (804) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Attorney-General and concerns the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021 and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's guidance on it. My reservations about this act are on the record, as is my vote against it. I am sorry to say that nothing in the intervening three years has persuaded me otherwise, and tonight I will touch on just one problematic element. With legislation this serious, which creates new offences and potentially criminalises parents, medical professionals and religious leaders, clarity is essential, yet the wording is complex and ambiguous. The VEOHRC was supposed to assist by providing interpretation and guidance for those whose work or family relationships might bring them into areas covered by the act. That guidance, however, has been alarmingly inconsistent. The original effort put online in 2022 stated it would be illegal under the act for a parent to refuse to:

... support their child's request for medical treatment that will enable them to prevent physical changes from puberty that do not align with the child's gender identity ...

That was later withdrawn, perhaps because someone noticed refusal might not legally constitute a 'practice or conduct'. The website intended to assist those who might be confused about their responsibilities has changed its advice in form, content and substantive definition several times. Most recently, as pointed out by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee's expert legal adviser Professor Jeremy Gans, it completely dropped two important examples of acts by parents which would break the law. These related to denying access to gender-affirming treatments and declining to follow the advice of doctors prescribing puberty blockers. This is the very definition of bad legislation.

The VEOHRC has either failed to understand or deliberately exaggerated the law's reach. The consequences are obvious and damaging. Uncertainty has understandably led generalist medical

practitioners to decline to treat children who may suffer a range of psychological conditions and instead to refer them to larger, more specialist gender clinics whose very existence is founded on acceptance of the gender-affirming model. So the action I seek, Minister, is an urgent update to this house on the progress of the review required by section 57 of the legislation, which must begin two years after the commencement of the act and be completed in six months.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (18:11): There were 11 matters raised today: Mr Galea to the Minister for Community Sport, Dr Heath to the Minister for Education, Mr Puglielli to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Mr Luu to the Minister for Health, Ms Payne to the Attorney-General, Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health, Mr Welch to the Minister for Housing, Ms Lovell to the Treasurer, Mrs Broad to the Minister for Health and Mrs McArthur to the Attorney-General. I will make sure that all those matters are passed on and there is an appropriate response in line with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:11 pm.