



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 16 October 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 <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha <sup>5</sup>	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 <sup>3</sup>	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 <sup>4</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard <sup>6</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 November 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> 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



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**Wednesday 16 October 2024**

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

*Petitions*

**Community safety**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 472 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the community concerns regarding the increase in crime and the lack of police presence in Lang Lang.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to provide funding for CCTV cameras as a deterrent to increased crime in Lang Lang, and boost police presence in the town through increased patrols and extended opening hours of the town's police station.

**Melina BATH:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Corrections system**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 3750 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that all Victorian prisoners are eligible for emergency management days while incarcerated, which can see up to four days of their sentence removed for each day they are inconvenienced due to industrial action, emergencies, disruptions and deprivations, including due to COVID-19 lockdowns. Over the two years that Melbourne and Victoria suffered through the world's longest COVID-19 lockdowns, thousands of prisoners received more than 360,000 days off their collective sentences. This is equivalent to over 1,000 years of jail time.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to, as a matter of urgency, remove the eligibility for violent and high-risk prisoners to access emergency management days and ensure that any sentence reduction due to emergency management days cannot reduce the time served to less than the minimum non-parole sentence.**

**Renee HEATH:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Corrections system**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 2855 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that ALL Victorian prisoners are eligible for Emergency Management Days while incarcerated, which can see up to four days of their sentence removed for each day they are inconvenienced due to industrial action, emergencies, disruptions and deprivations, including due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

Over the two years when Melbourne and Victoria suffered through the world's longest COVID-19 lockdowns, thousands of prisoners received more than 360,000 days off their collective sentences. This is equivalent to over 1,000 years of jail time.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to, as a matter of urgency, remove the eligibility for violent and high-risk prisoners to access Emergency Management Days and ensure that any sentence reduction due to Emergency Management Days cannot reduce the time served to less than the minimum non-parole sentence.

**Renee HEATH:** As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move ‘That the petition be taken into consideration’ on Wednesday of next sitting week.

### *Papers*

### **Papers**

#### **Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Protecting the Biosecurity of Agricultural Plant Species, October 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 92 and 110.

### *Business of the house*

### **Notices**

#### **Notices of motion given.**

### *Motions*

#### **Middle East conflict**

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:50): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since the Legislative Council’s resolution on 17 October concerning Israel and Gaza, which stated that this house ‘stands with Israel’, the following have occurred:
  - (a) Israel has killed or injured 130,000 Palestinians in Gaza and at least 10,000 Palestinians are missing;
  - (b) Israel has been conducting a bombardment in northern Gaza over the past 11 days that is killing children, aid workers, journalists and entire refugee camps;
  - (c) Israel attacked the al-Aqsa hospital complex, which set fire to a refugee tent camp, and one survivor described the scene: ‘The fire trucks couldn’t get here. There were so many burned and charred bodies all over the place. The amount of fire and explosions was enormous. We witnessed one of the most horrible and brutal nights’;
  - (d) a joint statement by 38 humanitarian groups describes that northern Gaza is being wiped off the map and that Israeli forces have ordered the forced displacement of an estimated 400,000 Palestinians trapped in northern Gaza, including in Gaza City; and
  - (e) Israel continues to attack south and north Lebanon, with over a quarter of Lebanon under evacuation orders – 1.2 million people displaced, including 400,000 children;
  - (f) does not support the state of Israel’s continued invasion of Gaza;
- (2) supports calls for immediate and permanent ceasefire; and
- (3) calls on the Victorian government to advocate to the Australian government that it ends its support for the state of Israel’s invasion of Gaza.

#### **Leave refused.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Croydon recycled water main**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): Last week I attended Barneong Reserve in Croydon, and it was very exciting because it marked the completion of a new recycled water main in Croydon, which will see the community benefit from a 300-metre water main delivering high-quality recycled water to green spaces, including the aforementioned reserve. It is expected to save Maroondah City Council approximately 3 million litres of drinking water each and every year. This is in partnership with the level crossing removal authority, and this new infrastructure was built by Yarra Valley Water to connect the reserve to its recycled water network.



Water plays a vital role in construction, as it is used for dust suppression and irrigation for landscaping. The recycled water pilot provides a way for construction projects to offset drinking water used during works. This initiative will offset 15.5 million litres of drinking water used during the construction of four level crossing removal projects over five years – equivalent to more than six Olympic-size swimming pools. Expanding recycled water infrastructure and diversifying water sources is crucial for securing our water supplies for the future. Most importantly it was great to visit the reserve and to be able to kick the footy around with the kids, who will be able to use and play on this beautifully manicured oval now and into the future.

#### **Melbourne Baseball Club**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): On Saturday I was honoured to throw the first pitch at the Melbourne Baseball Club in Surrey Park, Box Hill. Chairman Murray Noble, vice-chair Dominique Williams and women's club coach Craig Mitchell do a fantastic job keeping our kids involved in sport and planning for the future of the club and the pursuit of excellence. I assure the house that my pitch went straight over the plate, though a deceptive camera angle may lead people to think it went a little bit to the left. I assure you it went straight over the plate. I want to congratulate the club also on their advocacy efforts to ensure the north-west oval at Surrey Park is returned to the club so they can expand their junior programs.

#### **Vermont South Club**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:54): I would also like to thank Ken George and Di Agius from Vermont South Club for welcoming Michael Sukkar MP and me to their AGM and their opening day of the season. The club is composed of tennis, lawn bowls and darts divisions and provides a solid foundation for community engagement and connectivity in Vermont South's community. Michael and I had the privilege of rolling the first bowl of the year, and I look forward to joining the club again in a polliès competition later in the year.

#### **Duck hunting**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:54): When I got banned from the wetlands on the opening weekend of the duck-shooting season for committing the apparently awful crime of saving wounded and suffering wildlife, I paid the \$1000 fine. But I will tell you who did not: Laurie Levy, the 82-year-old veteran campaigner who started the Coalition Against Duck Shooting before I was even born and who was out on the boat with me. He was not taking the Game Management Authority's nonsense. This week a magistrate heard his case to contest it. He was told his work was appreciated, and his fine was rescinded in full and replaced with just \$500 in court costs and a good behaviour bond with no conviction. The best part of it all is that the GMA did not make a cent. This is consistent with the community's expectations – the very ones the government ignored when their own inquiry recommended that they end the recreational slaughter of our wildlife. We are still feeling the pain of that betrayal, but Laurie's persistence and passion fills me with hope and gives me a resilience I never thought possible. It might take us longer than we thought, but we will end duck shooting in Victoria. Because as Laurie said to me over 10 years ago – and it is now tattooed on my arm – kindness always trumps violence.

#### **Women's health**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:56): A few weeks ago my office was working with Matt Fregon and Kat Theophanous to put together a women's health forum. We all know that women's health is an important area. Many women go for years without proper treatment due to unavailability, fear or poor education. At the women's health forum we heard some amazing guest speakers who were kind enough to give us some of their time. Unfortunately, much of what we learned was horrifying. One in nine women and girls are affected by endometriosis, and almost half of women have lasting complications from childbirth. Fortunately, the Allan Labor government is combating this with historic investments in women's health. These commitments include six new women's health

hubs throughout Victoria and over 100 new scholarships to allow people to train in sexual and reproductive health, pelvic physio training, menopause and PCOS. I am proud to be part of a government that cares about women's health, and that is just the start of what will be a long commitment to looking out for all Victorians. I look forward to working with the Premier and my community to promote better outcomes in women's health.

### **Western Metropolitan Region bus services**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:57): The western suburbs are a political gem in the Labor crown, your own red wall. It is both the industrial and logistics heartland of Melbourne and home to the fastest growing residential areas in Australia. It is also a place residents increasingly feel taken for granted, where they are underserved, unheard and underappreciated. Every day tens and tens of thousands of those residents are reminded of this as they crawl along in their cars to get to work. They would love this expensive and frustrating experience to be alleviated by access to decent public transport. Park-and-rides at stations reach capacity early in peak hour because residents cannot access a bus to simply get them to the station. Whole suburbs have no access to any public transport whatsoever. But they look to the eastern suburbs, and they see billions being poured into transport projects.

There is an old saying that the price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative, and happily for the west there is just such a constructive alternative. The *Better Buses for Melbourne's West* study, done by Melbourne University, tells us that for around a hundred million dollars a year, more than a million westies could be provided with convenient, reliable and frequent bus services. A hundred million dollars a year for more than a million western suburbs commuters – that is barely a rounding error on the suburban rail link. It can be deployed quickly, with little disruption and without all the complexities a major infrastructure project brings, and with it are obvious environmental benefits and a reduction on the overall commuter roads to the western suburbs. What is not to like?

### **Melbourne Kannada Sangha**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): I recently had the privilege of attending the Kannada Bhavana open day and fundraising event, otherwise known as a dosa mela, which was organised by the Melbourne Kannada Sangha. Held at the Kannada Bhavana, the event aimed to raise funds for the maintenance and growth of this important cultural hub. Melbourne Kannada Bhavana plays a vital role in preserving the language and culture of the Kannada-speaking community of Victoria by offering classes, library services and a monthly newsletter *Melnudi*. It was really inspiring to see the community come together to support these efforts over, of course, some fantastic, delicious dosa. I also had a chance to, for the first time, try my hand at making some of the dosa, which received high praise, being labelled edible. It was a genuinely terrific event, and I would like to particularly thank Gandhi Bevinakoppa and the whole team there for welcoming me so warmly.

### **Casey Cavaliers**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): On another matter, I also had the privilege of joining with colleagues Mr Tarlamis and Mrs Hermans for the launch of the under-14 Australian junior club basketball championships recently at Casey Stadium. For the second time the Casey Cavaliers and the Casey Basketball Association hosted this nationwide event, seeing Australia's future basketball stars fighting it out for the trophy. We actually saw some terrific results, with the Casey Cavaliers girls team coming second and the Casey Cavaliers boys team coming first – some future stars indeed from the south-east of Melbourne.

### **Refugees and asylum seekers**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:00): Last month I met with members of the Hazara community in Geelong. Over three years ago the Taliban resumed power over Afghanistan, and it is hard to put into words what the people of Afghanistan have faced since that time: heavy restrictions on girls' education, women's participation and political and media freedoms; significant poverty and

unemployment; and then there is the shattering impact of many years of conflict and attempts at peacebuilding. For the Hazara community, a people who have faced many years of targeted persecution that many observers consider genocide, the reality of the past few years has been all the more terrible.

In Geelong family members are facing their own trauma. Added to the experiences that led them to seek refuge in Australia, they live in ongoing uncertainty about reunification with their loved ones and endure the perpetual cruelty of the limbo that is Australia's temporary protection visa system. It is a type of psychological torture that you would not wish on anyone, and this system has been deliberately designed and operated by Labor and Liberal governments. The Greens once again call for an overhaul of the humanitarian visa system, including waiting times for protection and family reunification visas and the processing of temporary protection visas to enable permanency, stability and the right to a life free from fear of persecution.

### **International Day of Rural Women**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (10:02): I continue the gender theme. Yesterday, 15 October, was International Day of Rural Women, and I want to mark this by acknowledging the women of my electorate who live with chronic pain. The Allan Labor government announced its landmark inquiry into women's pain in January this year. Since then I have conducted round tables in Warrnambool, Portland, Hamilton and online. I have also heard from women one on one and by email. I want to take the opportunity to thank the women who have shared their stories. These are not easy conversations to have, and I sincerely value their willingness to talk about such a personal subject. They did not feel that their voices were heard in dealing with the healthcare system. Too often their experience of pain was ignored or dismissed or misdiagnosed. Their untreated pain has had significant impacts on health, finances, careers and relationships. A point that is particularly crucial for rural women is being able to access the right care close to home, and I thank the Premier and Minister Thomas for bringing the focus to these important issues. Again, I ardently thank the many women of western Victoria who shared their stories with me.

### **Apology to stolen generations**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:03): Members of the stolen generations have never received an apology in person from the Victorian government, until last Thursday. The apology, delivered in private according to the wishes of the stolen generations and their families, was an important reminder that people in this place make decisions about the lives, families and futures of Aboriginal people, and sometimes in the past that has been based on racism, lies and prejudice.

The Premier apologised to those children who were forcibly removed from their families, to the babies and the children who grew up without knowing who they were and the mums and dads who were left, sometimes for a lifetime, searching. The Premier delivered the apology with those words in a safe space centred on Aboriginal culture for connection and for healing. The apology is not just words; it is also a promise to do better, to learn from our history and to ensure that those mistakes are never repeated. It is time to move forward, and it sets that out. It is difficult to describe to others the generational trauma the stolen generations have had on my mob, my family and my communities, so apologies – they matter, they help heal our community and help us on the path forward for our collective futures. For me and my mum, I say that cannot be more true.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call Mr Davis for his notice of motion 617, can people contributing to this motion bear in mind that there could be an anticipation issue as far as notice of motion 619 goes. If people could contain their contributions to the documents and calling for the documents, that would be great.

*Production of documents*

**Residential planning zones**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:05): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the announcement by the Allan Labor government of 10 high-rise, high-density designated activity centres, including associated catchment zones, namely:
  - (a) Hume City Council (Broadmeadows and Jacana);
  - (b) Boroondara City Council (Hawthorn, Hawthorn East, Camberwell, Canterbury, East Camberwell);
  - (c) Stonnington, Monash and Glen Eira councils (Malvern East, Oakleigh, Hughesdale, Murrumbeena, Chadstone);
  - (d) Whittlesea City Council (Epping, Mill Park and Lalor);
  - (e) Frankston City Council (Frankston and Seaford);
  - (f) Bayside, Glen Eira and Kingston city councils (Bentleigh, Brighton East, Hampton East, Moorabbin and Highett);
  - (g) Moonee Valley City Council (Niddrie, Essendon and Airport West);
  - (h) Moonee Valley City Council (North Essendon, Essendon and Strathmore);
  - (i) Darebin City Council (Preston, Northcote, Thornbury and Reservoir);
  - (j) Maroondah and Whitehorse city councils (Ringwood, Ringwood East, Heathmont, Mitcham and Heatherdale);
- (2) further notes the recent declaration by the Allan Labor government of population growth targets over the next three decades for Victorian municipalities;
- (3) requires the Leader of the Government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, advice, briefs, documents, assessments and modelling relied upon by the Minister for Planning and/or the Premier in making their announcement of:
  - (a) the municipal population targets; and
  - (b) the 10 high-density, high-rise activity centres and their associated catchment zones.

This is a straightforward documents motion that notes the announcement by the Allan Labor government of 10 high-rise, high-density designated activity centres, including the associated catchment zones. They are Hume council; Boroondara City Council; Monash, Stonnington and Glen Eira councils; Whittlesea council; Frankston council; others at Bayside, Glen Eira and Kingston; Moonee Valley council, where there are two; and Darebin City Council. Maroondah and Whitehorse councils make up the final one, running from Heatherdale all the way out to Ringwood East and through the central part of Ringwood but going a significant distance in the catchment zone in either direction – I am using that by way of example. It further notes the recent declaration by the Allan Labor government of population targets over the next three decades for Victorian municipalities. It requires the leader of the government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, advice, briefs, documents, assessments and modelling relied on by the Minister for Planning and/or the Premier in making their announcement of (a) the municipal population targets and (b) the 10 high-rise, high-density activity centres and their associated catchment zones.

This, as the President outlines, is actually a narrow documents motion. The decisions on the 10 high-density, high-rise zones – these are very large areas of our city. There are about 120-odd major activity centres in our city; 10 of them have been designated in this way for high-rise, high-density with massive so-called catchments. The catchments allow, according to the government documents, either three- or six-storey as-of-right development.

The Minister for Planning and the Premier in making this announcement must have relied on briefing material, modelling and assessments that have been undertaken and must have been provided with briefs by the department. What this documents motion is seeking is those sources of information on

which the Premier and the Minister for Planning relied – it may be that there is a deep and concentrated amount of information and significant modelling; that is not my information, but I am happy to be corrected in that – and for that information to be provided to the chamber and the community and the councils to enable them to understand and make proper assessments of these matters.

In the case of the targets that have been set for municipalities, you can say a lot about this, but again, this is an attempt to understand how the government arrived at the various targets, how they developed the targets, what modelling was behind them, why more here and less there and what background work has been done to develop those specific targets. That is actually the essence of the documents motion. It is not a complex motion. It refers to two recent planning decisions that have been made by government, two recent steps that have been taken by government in the case of the targets and councils being advised of these, without much at all in the way of consultation.

In the case of the high-rise, high-density activity centres, they fall into two parts. There is often a central node, and the example in Ringwood is one of them where there has been discussion with government about the very central node. That is in around the station and Eastland and so forth. But the new thing that completely popped out of the blue when the government made this announcement was the catchment zones, which go for more than 800 metres in some places but in general at least 800 metres in a series of directions out from these central nodes – so they are quite large so-called catchment zones. How did the government arrive at these, what examination and modelling did they do in the particular areas and what material was presented to the Premier and the Minister for Planning that enabled them to make these announcements? They must have had information in front of them that enabled them with some confidence to go out and make these announcements. The community has every right to see that information, and the community has every right to have significant examination of that information.

I know the councils were completely and utterly surprised. In the case of Maroondah, in the case of Whitehorse, in the case of Boroondara, in case of Stonnington and even in the case of Monash, the councils – I am quoting a few here – were ‘completely surprised’ by these catchment zones. There had been no discussion on those matters. The government must have somehow or other had material in front of them and must have had some assessments. Maybe they have got the Victorian Planning Authority, the VPA, to do modelling. I am told that there is modelling at the VPA. I have not seen the modelling. Others have discussed that with the VPA and received back from the VPA modest pieces and snippets of information. For example, with respect to heritage and the protection of heritage, we are told, through people who have discussed it with the VPA – these are direct conversations that have come to me to from those who have had the conversations with the VPA – that they have modelled the loss of 50 per cent of the heritage zones. Michael Buxton is the one; he has spoken to the VPA.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:12): I rise to speak on Mr Davis’s documents motion seeking a range of materials, pursuant to standing order 10.01, relating to advice, briefs, documents, assessments and modelling relied on by the Minister for Planning and the Premier in making their announcement of the 10 activity centres and population targets therein. Noting that this is a short-form documents motion, I do not propose to spend it talking about conversations that someone has had with someone else at the pub who has talked to someone who has seen the documents. That is not how we rely on evidence to conduct serious debate.

What I will say is that the government’s announcement of the metropolitan activity centres as part of the housing statement in September 2023 has been accompanied by substantial amounts of information which has been put into the public domain. As this is a motion seeking documents relating to these decisions, I would encourage Mr Davis and other members who are interested in good public policy, who are interested in good public engagement and who are interested in figuring out how we are going to solve the housing crisis – how we are going to find ways to provide homes for more Victorians, which is what is at the centre of this policy question. How do we make sure that there are enough homes for Victorians to live in, and how do we make sure that more Victorians are able to live closer to transport, amenities, jobs and schools and take advantage of the existing infrastructure that

we have in suburban Melbourne so that we are not pushing more and more people who want to buy somewhere to live to our urban growth corridors and see an ever-expanding urban growth boundary? For people who are interested in that, like Mr Davis, I would encourage them to go to the Engage Victoria website, where there is substantial information in the public domain that goes exactly to the answers that Mr Davis is seeking to find in the documents motion here today.

The activity centres program has a detailed page on the Engage Victoria website which goes through all of the steps and factors that have been taken into account in determining why the program is needed, how long the planning process is going to take, the way that the planning authority undertakes planning in each of these activity centres, the architectural testing that they do, the site context analysis that is done, the built form testing that is available, the way that the new overlays in the Victorian planning provisions have been developed, the plan sets that have been developed for each of these activity centres and how this process is going to be implemented – how the activity centre plans are going to be implemented.

With things like maps, matrices, analysis, they are not just for the overall context, but they are documents already available in the public domain on the Engage Victoria website which actually step through for each of the 10 metropolitan activity centres exactly how those decisions have been made. Things like the site context analysis, which pieces of infrastructure or what types of dwelling and land usage apply in these existing centres already, what is the local infrastructure, how that has gone and how all of that is factored into the plans for consultation are all there in the public domain on the Engage Victoria website – an overarching site with a page for each of the metropolitan activity centres. There is a lot of information in the public domain.

Obviously the government is not going to be opposed to this documents motion. It is not our practice to do so. But if people want to know more about the metropolitan activity centres, the process it has gone through, the methodology and the rationale, [engage.vic.gov.au/activitycentres](http://engage.vic.gov.au/activitycentres) is the place you should go to find out more.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:17): I also rise to speak on the motion 617, which has been put forward by Mr Davis and his NIMBY colleagues in the Liberal Party this morning, and in doing so note that whilst I do not intend to foreshadow potential remarks which we may come to later in the day when we do have a chance to debate that in the general business slot, I do at the outset wish to say that it is an important subject indeed for the reasons that Mr Batchelor was going through. I know housing is an extremely important issue for all Victorians, having partaken in the recent Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the issue of housing and rental affordability. We saw lots of evidence around issues affecting that side of the equation, and when it comes to density it is an important conversation to be having, and that is exactly why we are having that conversation. That is exactly why, as Mr Batchelor said, we have started that engagement process, that consultation, and are actually talking to these communities so that each community can help to form what will become those plans for their future growth.

Some in the Liberal Party – it seems to be the current policy of the Liberal Party – wish to advocate for further and further urban sprawl, urban development, but this is a government that recognises that whilst there will always be a place for that sort of greenfield development, we cannot continue that at the pace that we are currently doing. I will again come to some of these issues later in the day, but we know that the Liberals have no plan for the outer suburbs. They just would rather see them continue to grow and grow and grow without actually looking at some of those structural issues when it comes to density.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: I would be happy to take up your interjection, Mr Mulholland, and I can talk about all the ways in which we are funding those growing suburbs. I can talk to you about the three new schools that we are building right now in the Berwick electorate, in Clyde North. I can talk to you

about Mirniyan Primary School, which will be opening next year, and the two other primary schools as well. I can also talk to you about the two onsite school kinders that will also be built over the next two years at some of these new schools as well. That of course comes on top of Topirum Primary School, which opened this year, and on top of the multiple primary schools that opened in recent years and indeed the onsite kinder, which will be opening at Topirum next year as well. There are many, many things, and that is just in one space. That is just in early childhood and in education that we are making those investments in those outer suburbs. We have also of course announced the growth areas infrastructure contribution funded four bus route extensions in the south-east, which will particularly benefit Clyde North, and they will help Berwick and help Beaconsfield, Officer and Pakenham as well. Whether it is road upgrades, major and minor, or whether it is the new hospital upgrades or the new community hospital in Cranbourne, whichever way you look at it – to take up Mr Mulholland's interjection there – we absolutely are investing in those outer suburbs. But we also know that we cannot continue to grow these suburbs at the rate that they are currently growing. We must think better and we must think smarter.

We know that those opposite have no new ideas and that they do not want to see any changes. They do not want to see any density in those areas, such as Camberwell, such as Moorabbin, which have the transport networks in place to accommodate it. This is a government that is prepared to have those conversations with these communities, with these councils. I note some very positive feedback we have received from a number of those councils. Just a couple of weeks ago, along with Mr Davis and Mr Mulholland, I was in Frankston for the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's hearings into local government, and we heard in very good terms and good praise from Frankston City Council their vision for the *Frankston Metropolitan Activity Centre Structure Plan*, otherwise known as FMAC. Frankston City Council sees the issue, but it also sees the opportunities and the future that we can build in a place such as central Frankston. So too does Kingston council when it comes to Moorabbin. Kingston are very excited and very proactive indeed in facing the housing challenge head-on.

Mr Davis may wish to align himself with those forces that want to keep leafy inner suburban Hawthorn the way it was a hundred years ago, but this is a government that is delivering housing for all Victorians, not just those who have the privilege of owning multimillion-dollar mansions in the inner city. I will leave my remarks there. I am sure I will have some further things to elaborate on later on this day.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:22): I rise and follow my colleagues Mr Galea and Mr Batchelor in making some remarks on the short-form documents motion that is before us, moved by Mr Davis, that draws our attention to the housing statement. I could not be more delighted to stand here and talk about the incredible work of the housing statement, but I also know that the communities that will be highlighted in the motion include some in the Northern Metropolitan Region that I know are especially excited about more housing for more Victorians right here in Melbourne's inner-city suburbs. The truth is we know that Melbourne's population is set to match London by the 2050s, and we need to make sure that we ensure that as our populations grow, our communities grow with it.

The housing statement was delivered in September last year, and we knew that some of the biggest blockages were coming from local council, and that is why I was delighted to see that there was a commitment to 10 activity centres across Melbourne. These are in places that can support more communities with more homes, because these are already really enriched communities in terms of the social and cultural aspects and elements of the communities. People need and deserve quality homes in areas close to jobs, close to transport, close to families but also close to medical centres, close to high-quality schools and others. Areas that have heaps of these options – areas like Camberwell, areas like those around Boroondara City Council – well, folks deserve to live there too. That is why I am entirely supportive of the housing statement and all that comes with that, because we are trying so much to deliver more homes for more Victorians. That is what we are absolutely committed to, because people want to live here. This is a thriving city attracting people from all over the country and indeed, now we know, all over the world.

We have sought feedback from councils, and I am very happy to say that many have contributed to that through Engage Victoria and through direct engagement. I know that prior to the public launch of the draft activity centre plans, specific meetings were indeed held with relevant councils to outline the contents of these activity centre plans, including areas relating to their catchments. I was really happy to see that the Allan Labor government has in fact met with every single council this year about the draft housing targets for local government areas and asked councils to report back on the draft target and the local changes that they propose. The housing statement, as I said, contains so much that will be good for Victorians, including some elements that I know will go to the following short-form documents motion, which is around more social housing and greater rental rights. So I am delighted to make a short contribution, and I appreciate the additional time afforded to me today to speak to that.

### **Motion agreed to.**

#### **Housing**

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:26): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the social housing regulation review final report was delivered to the government on 31 May 2022 but still has not been released to the public and the community and affordable housing sectors remain woefully under-regulated; and
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, the social housing regulation review final report.

This is calling for the production of the social housing regulation review final report. In 2021 the government undertook an independent review into the regulation of our social housing sector, looking at how it supports both existing and prospective tenants and also encourages future investment in public and community housing. The interim report made a series of important recommendations for reform, including introducing minimum housing standards for social housing properties, having a single regulator for public and community housing, having a shared complaints body and putting tenants' interests in legislation. The final report was delivered to the then housing minister in May 2022, but that report has never been made public. The government has had the report for two and a half years now, but we are still waiting for the government response and for the release of the original report itself.

In the meantime the government has continued on its warpath against public housing. We are seeing the government demolish public housing at breakneck speed and replace it wholesale with community and so-called affordable and private housing. The government's agenda to privatise housing across the state is going to leave many residents fending for themselves in a broken housing system, whether that is in the private market or in under-regulated community and affordable housing sectors.

We are already hearing from people engaging with the affordable housing sector what a shambolic mess it is turning out to be. To begin with, the system for getting what the government likes to call affordable housing – it is hard to know what is affordable about it, but that is the term they are using for it. The system to get one of those houses in the so-called affordable housing scheme is basically a lottery system. We have heard from several constituents that they have applied for affordable housing, met all of the eligibility criteria and yet have been denied a house because their income is lower than other applicants. Private, for-profit real estate agents like Barry Plant are being left to decide the housing fate of people on low incomes – often vulnerable Victorians. And as the government continues to abrogate responsibility for public housing to the community and affordable housing sector we are wondering if real estate agents will become the housing workers of the future, because it seems to be what the government is planning to do.

It is a truly dark prospect when you consider all of the negligent and predatory practices of the real estate industry that are being exposed each day as renters stand up for themselves and fight back. We have also heard from many public and community housing residents about the dismal state they are



being left in due to a backlog of maintenance requests, and now it seems these issues are plaguing affordable housing tenants too. If this is the future of affordable housing built around this state, we should all be very concerned.

The government must regulate the affordable housing system and all the private market players who are hoping to make a buck off people on low incomes, but as the government drags its feet on responding to the social housing regulation review – let alone releasing the report – these tenants have nowhere to turn for support against under-regulated housing providers. We have even heard of affordable housing residents ending up at VCAT just to have the most basic maintenance requests fulfilled.

As for community housing, it has an important role to play in the continuum of affordable housing options available to Victorians; however, it should not be replacing public housing. It was never designed to replace public housing, but that is what this government seems intent on doing. And what is happening under the government's so-called public housing renewal program? On the ground lease model sites and with what is planned for the 44 public housing towers estates, we are seeing this wholesale outsourcing and privatisation of what once was public housing. It is really disappointing that this government has continued to pit community housing against public housing. They have implied that there is only room for one. Really what we need is a massive build of public housing, at least 100,000 homes in the next 10 years, and community housing can continue to play its role of being a specialist housing provider, which was always the intention for community housing. It was never intended to replace public housing. Proper regulation of community housing so that tenants are not paying more rent than they ought to and so that they have long-term, secure tenure in their homes is a matter of urgency now.

Minister, while we wait for you to release the social housing regulation review, residents are falling through the cracks of our social housing system. I call on the government to release the final report and the government's response without delay. We have heard repeatedly from the minister that the report will not be released until the government issues its response simultaneously. We have waited for over two years, and the people that are suffering the most are the people who are forced to accept social housing that is substandard and inadequate, where maintenance is not met and they have nowhere to turn. They are coming to us weekly if not daily with requests that are unmet. It is a matter of urgency that the social housing regulation review at least is made public to all of us so that we can understand what recommendations were made and that the government's response follows as a matter of urgency. We must regulate this sector properly now.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:31): I rise to follow Dr Ratnam in speaking on the motion moved in her name about the social housing regulation review, and from the outset can I just say that the government will not be opposing this motion. We are really proud of our investment in public and community housing with the nation-building Big Housing Build; this is Australia's biggest investment in social housing ever.

Alongside the announcement of the Big Housing Build, the Victorian government has commissioned an independent review of social housing regulation. The Assistant Treasurer and the Minister for Housing are jointly responsible for overseeing the review, and this is a really significant body of work, with policy, operational, administrative and funding implications. I have indeed met with sector groups about this review and undertaken to understand from them what their contributions were, what they are seeing on the ground and what it is that they are hearing from not only the providers but also people waiting to get into social housing and those that are in social housing. And so can I say thank you very much to all of those that found the time to engage and participate in this review. There were many, many stakeholders, and it is a significant part of work. There is no way around it. But we are very much proud of working with social and community housing providers to unlock more housing opportunity for Victorians that need it most.

These are organisations that are operating right across the state, including those that have some really specialist skill sets and some knowledge, those that specialise in housing needs for those suffering mental ill health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, those escaping family violence, young people et cetera. Some of these organisations have been around for a very long time, like Aboriginal Housing Victoria; others are newer to the landscape. But what I know is that these organisations have got some work to do, frankly; I will be really honest about that. What I am hearing from my community is that they do want to get better in the provision of social housing to communities that they support. That is why I was happy to see that so many of them had engaged so optimistically with the review.

What the interim report found and what was raised in the interim report was that we do need more of these organisations out there to become registered housing providers. I have a particularly close relationship with Aboriginal Housing Victoria, and I know that the Victorian government is supporting more Aboriginal organisations to become registered housing providers under the regulatory system so they will be able to participate in the Big Housing Build, unlock capital, unlock investment and unlock more homes for Victorians that need them.

One of the big challenges that I know Dr Ratnam and others, including me, have spoken about is that there is a very significant maintenance backlog that did build up during COVID. I want to say that there has been quite a considered renter-centric response to that, including something that I know was particularly exciting to members of the North Richmond community, which were some locally trained and locally employed maintenance repair crews. Some of the biggest issues that are coming up time and time again to those of us in our electorate offices are around maintenance inquiries. To hear that there is a more renter-centred response, including these four local maintenance repair crews, often staffed by folks that live in social and community and public housing, will ensure that these small-scale tasks can be fixed rapidly – I am thinking fix a washer et cetera – and that local community resources are organised and that they can work with others to get the training and skills required.

There was also one that I participated in about 18 months ago, which was the statewide public housing renter consultative committee led by Minister Pearson at the time in his capacity as the housing minister. These were really to test the specific reform directions with renters across the state, hear their ideas and facilitate some constructive two-way conversations with renters. I participated in them both at 120 Racecourse Road as well as in Carlton, and I think there were a couple more, but I know the one at Racecourse Road did have some very fulfilling conversations. Can I say all the recommendations have been directed to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. They are working on them very diligently, and they will be considered alongside the review's final report. I will leave my remarks there.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:36): I want to thank Dr Ratnam for bringing this short-form documents motion to the chamber on the social housing regulation review, which was delivered to the government on 31 May 2022, prior to my election to this place. So it was delivered to the minister 870 days ago; for 870 days they have been sitting on this report. You have got to ask really what the government have to hide and what is in there that means it has been sitting on the minister's desk gathering dust for 870 days. Since 2018 the Labor government has wasted \$4 billion on public housing but delivered only 221 extra homes – \$4 billion for 221 extra homes. More than 3000 families have been added every year to the waitlist since 2018 as wait times to secure a safe home have more than doubled. The Allan Labor government's mismanagement of public housing is seeing homes sold off and demolished faster than new properties can be built, all while \$4 billion of taxpayers money has been spent.

Of course this is typical of this Labor government. They cannot manage money, they cannot manage projects, and it is vulnerable Victorians that are paying the price and suffering the consequences. We do call on the Allan Labor government to deliver on their public housing commitments so that vulnerable Victorians are not forced onto the streets. As I said, it has been 870 days that this report has been sitting on the minister's desk gathering dust, and Victorians ought to know what is in that report.

The minister ought to be quick I think – pull it out of the bottom of the in-tray and bring it over to the chamber. This will be passed very shortly. Perhaps we could get it by the end of the day. I suspect we will not get it for a while. I suspect there will be a letter extending the response time, and I suspect at some point they will claim privilege or something like that. That is probably the likely outcome, and it will be sitting on her desk for another 870 days, but the Victorian people deserve to know what is in this report.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:39): I also rise to make a contribution on this short-form documents motion raised by the Greens. Of course, unfortunately, I do not have much time to talk about it because the standing orders have been changed to effectively nobble the government to be able to fully and comprehensively respond to some of these things. But that is how they want it in this chamber, because sometimes there are some inconvenient truths that we would actually like to point out to those opposite, or the crossbenchers, about these motions. I am pleased to say I am grateful to have followed Ms Watt, because in her contribution Ms Watt actually detailed quite comprehensively some of the really good initiatives that are happening for social or public housing tenants, particularly in Richmond, where I heard some really good examples of locals being engaged and involved in repair and maintenance projects. It is great to see local community members actually being involved and engaged and taking ownership of tasks that are related to the homes in which they live. It is critically important, and these are the great initiatives that those opposite and the crossbenchers, the Greens, would not really know anything about, because it is one thing to be able to stand in this place and say anything you like and be completely unaccountable for anything you say, but when you are in government there are things that you have to do and you have to be accountable for the things that you say.

We are working really hard to make sure that people who rely on us for social or affordable housing, or public housing, have the homes that they need, because as we have heard in the rhetoric from the Greens, you would think that we never do any of that and that what we are doing is basically making people's lives more difficult. But we know that there are many, many Victorians who rely on us to provide them affordable social housing, and we know that they are entitled to the same standards of housing as anybody else who might sit in this place. The Greens would want to see people live in old, dilapidated, outdated homes, freezing cold in winter, boiling hot in summer, all so they can manipulate and use vulnerable people for their own political purposes. That is exactly what the Greens do.

I am going to talk a little now about the social housing regulation review, and this is extensive work that was undertaken by the review. The government is actually considering the recommendations of that review, and the interim report highlights the need for more Aboriginal organisations to become registered housing providers. Ms Watt went exactly to that point. We heard about the great progress that is being made in regard to that, but if you listen to what the Greens would say and what Mr Mulholland would say, the report is actually in an in-tray somewhere on someone's desk gathering dust, which is not the case, because we have just heard what is happening on the ground locally. We are supporting Aboriginal organisations to become registered community housing providers under the regulatory system and to participate in the Big Housing Build program, and Ms Watt gave some examples of that. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has undertaken a program to significantly reduce the outstanding maintenance in public housing that accumulated during COVID-19, when those restrictions were in place, and we are working through that. We are also supporting a more renter-centric response, and the department of fairness and housing is trialling four local maintenance repair crews across five locations in Victoria. Again, Ms Watt went to that in her contribution – an outstanding response and outstanding actions. The interim report also identifies complaints in dispute resolution as an issue, mirroring findings in the Victorian Ombudsman's report and investigation into complaints handling in the Victorian social housing sector.

All the recommendations directed to the department of fairness and housing are being implemented, and the recommendations directed at the Victorian government are being considered alongside the review's final report. As you can see, when there is a comprehensive review undertaken of some

regulations, we need to make sure that we consider these things appropriately and look for opportunities to ensure that local communities who are living in these houses and Aboriginal corporations can actually be involved in that. We are working to do that. The thing that the Greens probably do not realise is that when you need to set up these sorts of changes or actions as a consequence of a regulatory review, it takes time. You need to consult with stakeholders, and we are consulting with stakeholders. There is action that has been happening. As I said, we are supporting Aboriginal organisations to become registered community housing providers, which means they get a greater opportunity to have more self-determination over the houses that they would manage.

I think I will leave my remarks there, but again, it is just another example of the short amount of time that the government has to be able to respond to these sorts of motions. We are not opposing the motion, and our record is pretty clear when we look at these sorts of documents motions. The government routinely does not oppose them, and we routinely release documents that pertain to them.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:44): I have got a minute and a half, thanks to the standing and sessional orders, to contribute to this debate. I like talking about housing because it is one of the most pressing public policy challenges that this state faces, and it is something that is an absolute priority for the Allan Labor government. What this motion is seeking is a document from the social housing review. The government will not be opposing this motion – we do not routinely oppose document motions. What I hope is that the provision of documents in a housing debate might lead the Greens to stop lying about the housing debate and stop perpetuating untruths and misinformation in this Parliament and on social media about the government’s housing agenda and about housing policy in this state. They are trying to use fear and misinformation as the basis on which to extract political gain in the community. They are dividing our communities using fear and misinformation.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, Acting President, this is actually a very narrow documents debate. The member here is now going on a wide frolic, attacking another political party in a way that has got nothing to do with the documents motion.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, talking about a document to get to truth is essential to democracy.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I did not hear the remarks. However, I understand that the time has now expired anyway, so we will conclude that little frolic and we will put that motion to a vote.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Greyhound racing**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (10:46): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) only greyhounds that are euthanised by on-track veterinarians or die during a race are recorded as racing fatalities by Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV);
  - (b) GRV does not break down euthanasia data by reason in its annual report;
  - (c) in 2022–23, the industry reported 2688 retired greyhounds as rehomed of which 1082 were initially rehomed through the Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP);
  - (d) in 2022–23, 103 positive swabs for a prohibited substance were recorded, an increase from the previous year;
- (2) calls on the government to include further detail in the GRV annual report, including:
  - (a) all deaths that occur as a result of, and within 10 days of, an injury sustained at any race event or trial reported as racing-related fatalities and included with the on-track fatality toll;

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- (b) reason for euthanasia of all dogs that die off track, including in training;
  - (c) a breakdown of non-GAP rehoming figures to include how many dogs are:
    - (i) retained as pets by registered participants;
    - (ii) rehomed as pets by registered participants to non-registered members of the public;
    - (iii) accepted by another rehoming or research agency;
    - (iv) secondarily rehomed by volunteers after being adopted out by GAP or a participant;
    - (v) sent interstate or overseas through Racing 2 Rehome or other means;
  - (d) how many dogs test positive for each type of prohibited substance; and
- (3) further calls on the government to consider measures to reduce the use of prohibited substances including the immediacy of hearings and outcomes.

Each week I stand in this place and update the chamber on dogs that have being killed racing in Victoria, and every week without fail that number climbs. I wrote parts of this speech ahead of time, which means that I had to check that the figures were still accurate by the time I stood on my feet today. As is often the case, they were not. At 5:45 pm last night while sitting in the chamber I was notified that Gossips had broken his leg and was killed at Healesville. So far 39 dogs have been killed on tracks this year in Victoria. When Call Me Artie broke his leg and was killed in August, Victoria had already exceeded the death toll recorded for the whole of last year. In fact most dogs that race in Australia die right here in Victoria. With a national death toll of 105 dogs, we are shamefully leading by 18 of them. In May Shima Shadow won the Geelong cup in a race that the media described as 'brilliant'. This particular race had a payday of \$75,000. After not winning for some time, it was, as the industry described, Shima's emergence from the shadows, but days later greyhound advocates noticed his status had quietly changed on the industry's reporting database known at FastTrack. He was now listed as deceased. What followed were a series of back-and-forth emails from my office to Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV). Eventually they admitted that Shima sustained an injury in a training accident that led to his euthanasia.

In another email they claimed that, despite occurring in training, the death was not racing related. When my office questioned this the return email attempted to explain that in their opinion his fatality was not racing related because Shima Shadow was not racing on race day when he injured himself. The only way for this to be interpreted is that there is one set of greyhound racing deaths that are viewed in front of cameras and therefore must be acknowledged, but the other, larger set that happen behind closed doors just do not have to be. If it was not captured on video, according to GRV, it just did not happen.

Buried in Greyhound Racing Victoria's annual report – a separate figure to the on-track death toll under the category 'euthanasia' for the 2022–23 financial year – the number 382 is printed, 382 dogs just like Shima Shadow. If, say, Shima died on impact at the Geelong cup, his death would be counted in this year's toll, but all that needs to happen to avoid that is a trainer taking his injured body home and then to an offsite vet clinic the very next day. This is how the industry keeps its death toll down. This is why a 10-day period, at a minimum, of mandatory inclusion in the overall death toll must be adopted.

On Monday another story on greyhound racing ran in the *Guardian* that perfectly sums up why this motion must be supported today. A vet clinic accidentally sent an email to the greyhound rehoming group Greyt Greys Rescue that was meant for an industry trainer. It contained evidence that this trainer had brought his one-year-old greyhound in with a minor leg injury and demanded that they be euthanised. The clinic notes read, 'Owner not interested in taking X-rays or attempting possible repair.'

Had this email mistake not occurred, the story of this dog would be known only as a number, one of hundreds of dogs that are euthanised away from the track each and every year – a life that is so meaningless to the industry that death does not even warrant a reason. It makes you wonder how many out of the 382 greyhounds euthanised in Victoria last year took their final breath at the hands of a vet who did not want to kill them. At least it makes me wonder.

And this is not an isolated incident. In September the Victorian Racing Tribunal (VRT) found a registered participant had a greyhound unnecessarily euthanised after multiple requests at separate clinics. After noticing no signs of ill health, St Albans Vet Clinic offered a medical examination that was refused by the trainer. The vet later told a tribunal that the greyhound did not appear injured. No effort had been made to rehome them. In 2022 another trainer was found guilty of euthanising nine healthy dogs between the years of 2016 and 2019. He had lied to GRV, claiming all the dogs had been retired to himself as pets. Stewards only discovered the dogs were dead during kennel inspections almost two years later.

These are just the cases that we know about. Without the changes I am proposing today, greyhounds can and will continue to be euthanised under the guise of internal rehoming. In July the former chief vet of Greyhound Racing NSW Dr Alex Brittan revealed harrowing allegations of cruelty in a report where he alleged that there are vets known by the industry who will willingly euthanise high numbers of greyhounds. The report names two corrupt vets who it says are responsible for half the euthanasia in New South Wales. The report details the need for clear and unequivocal advice to vets detailing how to respond if and when a participant requests euthanasia of a racing greyhound. At least New South Wales had the decency to announce an independent inquiry into greyhound racing in their state, something Greyhound Racing Victoria and this government still refuse to do.

Just this week my office received an anonymous letter from someone who I can only assume recently exited the industry, and it is something that happens often. It reads:

... the deaths published are nowhere near the correct numbers ... All clubs have been told by the stewards not to use dogs on tracks unless they can control pain.

Otherwise the stewards send them home with the owner to then take them to the vet the next day and get them euthanised. Because GRV do not want you to know about the number of greyhounds being killed. We would only be getting about 25 per cent of the real number. The letter continues:

I have seen so many that break their legs and have seizures on the tracks because the whole greyhound industry is riddled with drugs. The trainers do not care about the welfare of the dogs. All they care about is the money that they win on the punt. The stewards protect the big trainers and deal with it all in-house.

This is self-regulation at its very finest. In the letter it is also alleged that the GRV's integrity board recently covered up the death of up to 77 greyhounds after they starved to death at one single property. My office has reached out to substantiate these claims, as we have countless times over the past few years.

One of the reasons euthanasia is so high is because greyhound breeders have no limit at all. Desperate to train the fastest dog, they produce countless litters, selecting only some to eventually train. The industry is breeding roughly six times – six times – more puppies than their rehoming program, the Greyhound Adoption Program known as GAP, has the capacity to rehome. Trainers are literally pleading with volunteer rescue groups to pick up the slack, quoting a current waitlist to get into the industry program of more than 11 months. Each day they keep a dog they consider useless they are losing money, so dogs are either kept in harrowing conditions or they are killed, seen as nothing more than broken slot machines.

My office alone has rehomed at least five dogs in the time that I have been in Parliament. One greyhound named Ernie came to us from a trainer who was desperate. He had run out of options. He reached out to my staff as a last resort, and I think that demonstrates how severe this problem is. Worried that he would be euthanised, we drove out to Melton to pick him up and bring him into foster care until he was eventually adopted by a loving family. As happy as the outcome was, I am the very first to admit that this method of rehoming is not appropriate, and it is certainly not captured in the GRV annual report. In fact the only details they give are GAP and non-GAP, and what we know from this omission is that in the last financial year the industry claimed that 2688 greyhounds were rehomed, with less than half of those being rehomed through GAP. We recently found out through the Minister for Racing that on average GAP will physically take back into its care approximately 200 greyhounds

previously adopted through the program every single year. What happens to the dogs that are not successful GAP adoptions matters, and so this motion seeks to break down rehoming data to capture the dogs being passed on to industry family members, those retained as pets, those taken in by our incredible volunteer-run groups and importantly those exported interstate or overseas, often to be illegally raced.

Currently the annual report also tells readers how many dogs have tested positive for a prohibited substance. For the last reporting period it was 103 positive samples, an increase from the previous year. But only a small sample of dogs are tested, so when over 100 of them are testing positive to an illegal substance, it should be alarming to us. And of course the kinds of drugs that are showing up on these tests are omitted from the report too. To find that out you must open and search individual Victorian Racing Tribunal hearings, held sometimes over a year after the original test was taken. The annual report does, however, provide an excuse for the rise in doping:

The sport of greyhound racing has not been immune to cost of living pressures being experienced by broader society, which has contributed to an increase in positive swab outcomes.

What they mean here is ‘Not only should we not be blamed that dogs are being illegally drugged in the hundreds, but we should feel sorry for the people doing it because they are only trying to make some money.’ Caffeine, ventolin used in asthma puffers, arsenic, steroids, methamphetamines, testosterone and every pain medication you can think of are just some of the drugs trainers are experimenting with to make their dogs run faster, and they are doing it, frankly, because they can. It is almost as though the excuses for drugging dogs are being handed to participants by the industry themselves. I quote from reports:

How the dogs came to test positive is a mystery to you and to the Stewards.

We accept that you have no notion as to what caused these two positive swabs in such a short time.

Hopefully the mystery cause of the present offences will not recur.

Feeding greyhounds discarded meat from the horseracing industry was the most likely cause of a positive meloxicam swab.

The arsenic had been ingested by the dog chewing a fence post.

Ventolin can be transmitted to greyhounds by persons who use ventolin inhalers near them.

The opioids may well have been absorbed by each of the dogs whilst Mr Kubik was feeding them.

It might sound satirical, but these are literal quotes from VRT decisions, and the fines imposed are inconsequential when compared to the prize money a trainer can make for racing their dogs at unnatural speeds. The work we do in my office to uncover greyhound deaths is only possible because there is an entire team of greyhound advocates who do it full-time on a volunteer basis. The Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds spend hours every week monitoring the various databases that contain fragmented data on greyhounds and watching the same videos of dogs snapping their legs and backs repeatedly. CPG are painstakingly putting the pieces together to provide the only true account of greyhound racing in Victoria, but these dogs are more than just statistics, they are loving unique animals that just want to be adored, just like your dog at home. Yet under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 and the soon-to-be Animal Care and Protection Bill, they are not treated as such. Instead, they are exempt from any protection at all in those acts that is afforded to every other breed of dog. This allows for the open killing spree that is the greyhound racing industry, simply because they are written in our legislation to be less than dogs.

I want to share with you a personal story to put a name and a life behind the number. When I got elected and advertised roles in my office, the first application I got was from Frankie Gamble. Frankie was a greyhound. His mum Kelly wanted to be my office manager, and as it goes, they were a package deal. Each year that followed the team and Frankie’s other friends would gather for his birthday. We would celebrate not just Frankie’s survival from the industry but the countless other dogs that had been saved by his own advocacy. When someone met Frankie, you did not need to say a word to convince them of how special these dogs are. He did it all by himself. His life was his message. Sadly, over the

last few months my team watched as Frankie grew tired and as Kelly cared for his deteriorating health, and on Monday 7 October, the day before his 12th birthday, she made the decision for him to finally, peacefully rest. We spent the weekend before visiting him to say our final goodbyes. The constant rotation of the Frankie fan club members appearing with his favourite treats and their own rescued greyhounds was a testament to just how loved this old boy was. It was a testament to how all greyhounds should be treated and how they each deserve to leave this world.

It is not lost on me that much of this speech features the very words of the greyhound racing industry and its participants. Whether it be on FastTrack or the VRT or from the mouths of former trainers, the truth is out there. With this motion I am simply asking for it to be compiled in the one place, for public accountability to not be the job of people who would never dream of racing a greyhound. This motion does not end the greyhound racing industry. It merely asks for it to be transparent. It asks for honesty on the deaths that occur at the industry's hands. If against all sense you somehow support greyhound racing, then I would at least expect you to believe there is nothing to fear in GRV telling the truth. And for those of us who are adamantly opposed to it, you already know that the calls for accountability and transparency have been a long time coming.

So I dedicate this motion to Frankie Gamble and to every greyhound before him, to the greyhounds I have met that were born into greed but instead found love, those that were forced to race and those that never made the cut, and to the countless dogs that have been killed or discarded by an industry that refuses to acknowledge them. I commend it to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:07): I rise to speak on the motion which has been put forward by Ms Purcell today, and in doing so I am happy to indicate that I will be speaking in support of this motion. When it comes to improving animal welfare, transparency is one of the most important tools we have. At the outset I would like to acknowledge Ms Purcell's passion for this subject, which we all very much well know, but I would also like to take a brief moment to reflect on someone who became a friend of many of us in this place, and that is Frankie Gamble. I do not remember when I first met Frankie, when I saw this great big lump of grey coming down the hall – instantly affectionate, instantly friendly – and I was very privileged to have known him for a short while. We were all very happy and grateful to Kelly for bringing him into many of our lives here in this place, and we will certainly miss his presence in these halls.

I do want to talk today about this motion and what it sets out to achieve in the context of what I said at the outset, which is coming from that standing point of transparency being crucial. The reason I am so happy to speak in favour of it is because this is a motion that fundamentally is seeking more data and better, clearer data. Through that data we will be able to have the facts that can help to inform future policymaking decisions, as is the case in many areas of public policy but as is so particularly profound and so particularly important when it comes to animal welfare.

The greyhound racing industry in Victoria is indeed fairly large. It has significant revenue and it employs many people. That is an important thing to note, but that must be noted in the context of animal welfare being the most central consideration above all others. When it comes to the data that is supplied, I do note that there is already some considerable data provided by the Greyhound Racing Victoria body, GRV, in its annual report, and where this motion seeks to expand on that, that is to be welcomed. The report will include aspects such as race injuries, fatalities, euthanasia, rehoming and other key animal welfare data. At the crux of what I perceive this motion to be seeking to achieve is that drive to further improve what is reported in that report and expand the type of data reported, which is only going to lead to better and, most importantly, fairer outcomes for our greyhound friends.

Commencing with this year's annual report, for 2023–24, GRV I understand will already be increasing the detail in its reporting by providing a breakdown of reasons for euthanasia of registered Victorian greyhounds and publishing a separate figure for deaths attributed to illness, injury or natural causes. Since 2015 this government has worked with GRV to continually improve the animal welfare outcomes in the industry, and this has resulted in a 95 per cent increase in the number of greyhounds



being rehomed annually, an 89 per cent drop in the number of racing greyhounds that are euthanised and a more than 47 per cent drop in the rates of fatal injury in the Victorian greyhound races in the past five years. These are all stats to be celebrated, but they are not to be complacent about. There is much more to be done.

Over the past four years total injuries in Victorian greyhound races have dropped by more than 8 per cent, down from 34½ injuries per thousand starters to 31.66. Last racing season more than 92 per cent of all racing injuries were classified as non-serious by the officiating veterinarian, and those injuries that were classified as serious represent 0.2 per cent of all starters, which is a figure that is also down year on year. All instances of euthanasia of GRV-registered greyhounds by a vet are reviewed. Any noncompliance with the rules regarding euthanasia is investigated by the integrity unit, charges are laid for breaches and participants are prosecuted before the independent Victorian Racing Tribunal.

A very important part of this discussion is rehoming, and I note that Ms Purcell made a number of comments about the Greyhound Adoption Program as well. It is a very, very good opportunity for people to rehome a greyhound. Certainly it is fair to say that the industry has much more of a role to play, which it should be playing as the one responsible for creating the situation where greyhounds need to be adopted. I think it is only entirely reasonable that they take that responsibility in doing much more to facilitate that rehoming. Nevertheless the GRV's Greyhound Adoption Program found new homes for more than 1000 greyhounds, again, last year. Over 2500 greyhounds are rehomed annually by the GAP, other third-party adoption agencies or participants in total.

I also understand that the GAP has been running a successful pet prison program at Tarrengower Prison in Maldon, where more than 600 greyhounds have been prepared for adoption by the inmates there, who take responsibility for feeding and exercising the greyhounds and teaching them basic obedience skills. GAP provides the food and veterinary care for the greyhounds in the program and supports the women with the required training. The program fundamentally, therefore, is a win-win, as it helps get greyhounds ready for adoption and helps them find a new home. At the same time it allows prisoners to spend time with dogs and learn valuable skills before their release.

As it happens, I actually have had the chance to have some conversations with someone, a woman who was an inmate at Tarrengower Prison a fair while ago now, and for a long time this particular prison has been running a number of animal-related programs, whether it be greyhound adoption or other support programs where they bring animals in, giving benefit, most importantly, to the animals but of course also providing those activities, those training opportunities for inmates as well. This particular inmate who I spoke to was of an age where she was not required to participate in any of these programs, being in her 70s, but was actually very excited to take part in them anyway, being a vet nurse in her earlier life. I know from conversations with her – and obviously we can have a whole conversation about corrections separately – that prison can be a fairly isolating space, but I know for this particular inmate the ability to participate in a program the likes of which we are discussing with the GAP here was one of the most profoundly beneficial things for her in there. It made such a difference, naturally, to her rehabilitation prospects but also to her working towards an achievable goal, and for that particular inmate, having the opportunity to work with animals was indeed a very, very special thing. As well as the statistics, which clearly are vast and which show this program supports greyhound adoption, it is important to reflect on the personal stories and the benefits and impacts that those stories, those instances, can have on those people.

We have as a government done a number of reviews and reforms. There have been two inquiries into Victorian greyhound racing since 2015, one conducted by the racing integrity commissioner and the other by the chief veterinary officer. And it is my understanding that 67 of the 68 recommendations across those reviews in aggregate have been implemented, which has been a great measure to significantly strengthen animal welfare protection throughout the industry and has indeed been a great measure towards the improved statistics which I referred to earlier.

We have also overhauled aspects of the industry's governing structure and regulatory oversight, and this includes reforms that strengthened the racing integrity commissioner's powers of inquiry and also reforms that established the Victorian Racing Integrity Board and the Victorian Racing Tribunal, the VRT. Governance arrangements for GRV itself have also been completely overhauled, including a completely new board and management team as well as amending the provisions constituting the board to require it to have a member with expertise in animal welfare. It was also given stronger powers to investigate animal welfare breaches. There are further steps that we have taken, such as the whole-of-life digital tracking program, which if I did have more time I would love to go into more detail on. But I think it is important to return at the end of my speech to where I started, and that is to say that we can only have good outcomes in this space if we have good, effective and transparent data. This is a motion that seeks to improve the transparency of that data and improve that data itself, and therefore I do commend this motion to the house.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:17): The Liberals and Nationals will oppose this motion for the reasons that I will outline in this debate – 620 is the motion. If you wander your fingers to the website of the Animal Justice Party, which I did this morning – it is not a place where I regularly go, but I did this morning – you would see on the website that their stated aim, their stated goal as part of their platform, is to 'work towards ending all animal racing'. Does this mean all racing? Yes, greyhounds are stated. That is what this party is about – ending greyhound racing, period. It is about ending all sorts of racing. We are about to enter the cup season. The huge Spring Racing Carnival – that will be on their target. Does it also include Olympic equestrian events, where participants race for gold cups and medals? Is that what it includes? Does this end to all animal racing mean your local pony club events in Victoria, around the state, the barrel races where young people engaged in outside activity are looking to win a race for a blue ribbon? Is that what this is, named and stated?

Going to the website of the Animal Justice Party, it says that:

... Animal Justice ... believes that animals should be enjoyed, appreciated, respected and cared for in as close to their natural state as possible. They should never be terrified as they perform unnatural behaviours ...

That is from the Animal Justice Party. Well, let me provide to the house a case study on the Animal Justice Party's own behaviour –

*Members interjecting.*

**Melina BATH:** without assistance, as we heard before through the other debates. Let us talk about Angel. Angel was a Gippy goat in a domestic situation, in a legal farming operation system. It was housed with its other fellow herd members in Yarragon. Now, one morning in about January 2019, the Animal Justice Party decided it was a good idea to go and collect that goat. They made a choice to pick that goat up out of a pack, out of the herd, to put it in the back of a domestic car, to drive it away –

**Katherine Copsey:** On a point of order, Acting President, on relevance to the motion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I am not sure that a goat is relevant to a motion on greyhounds. It is a long bow. I ask you to come back to the motion, please.

**Melina BATH:** In my comment on this, it was put in a nappy and set at home and then Facebooked around the world.

**Georgie Purcell:** On a point of order, Acting President, I ask that the member be brought back to the motion. This is not a motion about the Animal Justice Party; it is about greyhound racing. It is not about goats.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I uphold the point of order.

**Melina BATH:** This is the party that wants to end all animal racing, and it wants to usurp those of the Greyhound Racing Victoria board – a board that has been installed and put in by the Labor Minister for Racing. It feels like he is being usurped in this particular motion before us today.

Nine years ago – there is no doubt across anybody’s mind – the greyhound racing industry needed to improve its animal welfare and its integrity outcomes. Nine years ago it needed to definitely pull up its socks, but in the past nine years Greyhound Racing Victoria has gone to extreme lengths to improve animal welfare, to improve the integrity of the racing industry and to be a world leader in the regulatory process of this industry. It is already certainly a leader in integrity and welfare, and I want to put on record some of the points. Indeed we have heard from the Labor Party there, from the speaker across the way, that there will be some changes in GRV’s annual report that is coming out soon. I thank Tim Bull, the Shadow Minister for Racing – a passionate person who is most interested and passionate about not only animal welfare but the racing industry and its integrity. He informs me, and we have had the conversation, about the changes to the GRV’s annual reporting. We have heard from the member across the way of some of those improvements.

What is clear – and the Animal Justice Party frequently choose not to present this fact – is that healthy greyhounds cannot be and are not euthanised because they are too slow. This is a myth, and it must be busted. I thank Mr Tim Bull for the work he is doing. Any noncompliance with the rules regarding euthanasia are investigated by the integrity unit, and serious breaches of those rules are certainly prosecuted and come before the independent Victorian Racing Tribunal. All healthy greyhounds must be rehomed or retained as pets by their owners.

If we look at some of this industry and the importance of it to not only our regional but our metropolitan economies, there are 4700 full-time equivalent jobs; over 13,600 participants, support staff and volunteers; and indeed the over \$643 million it generates to the Victorian economy on an annual basis. Boy, do we need industry to be generating for the economy in this deplorable black hole of a state. Greyhound Racing Victoria certainly is a statutory body. We heard it from the former speaker, but we also know that there is stringent transparency. As I have said, greyhounds at the end of their working life must be rehomed into a community or retained by their owners, and we know that they are beautiful creatures. We have heard that before. My ex-father-in-law, who I loved very dearly, died at a ripe old age well into his 90s. Why? Because he was a working member of the greyhound industry and walked his dogs well into his 90s because he loved them. I bless him every day for the work that he did and the love that he showed to those animals.

In the past four years there have been improvements in terms of animal welfare. Total injuries in Victorian greyhound races have dropped by 8 per cent. We have seen that in the last racing season more than 92 per cent of all racing injuries were deemed officially by the on-track veterinarians as non-serious. We see that fatality rates across Victorian races are down almost 50 per cent – 47 per cent – and long-term fatalities are diminishing as well. We know that there are some fantastic racing clubs – Sale, in my electorate, Traralgon as well, Warragul, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Cranbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and the Meadows, where my father-in-law loved to spend much of his time, for example.

The greyhound racing integrity welfare unit is certainly being proactive in its detection, in its investigation and its prosecution of those that are doing wrong. Just on the swabs, I note that in the last year 10,428 swabs were taken, and prohibited substances were detected in 70 samples, well down from the 103 that we heard about from the Animal Justice Party just today. Also, in terms of visits to various homes and establishments, property visits, there were 2818 visits this year, compared to 1700 last year.

Finally, in terms of some of the conversations we have heard about the Greyhound Adoption Program, we have heard about the important work that it does, and we endorse its work and that of other registered rehoming organisations. One of the things that I find quite bizarre is that in paragraph (2)(c) the member is calling for the GRV to track any greyhounds that are accepted by another rehoming or research agency and then secondarily rehomed by volunteers after being adopted out by the GAP or a participant. If you look at that, my dear colleague Danny O’Brien has Maisie. He has had Maisie for about seven years. If Maisie was adopted out for whatever reason – Danny went overseas and his

family went overseas, heaven forbid – the GRV would be expected to track that dog and every dog to the nth degree.

I have to say the Nationals and the Liberals will be opposing this motion. We know that the Animal Justice Party has an end goal to end all racing. This is just one step in it, and I think the Labor Party is complicit in the diminishment of all racing.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:27): I rise to speak on Ms Purcell's motion, and I thank her for bringing it today. The Greens will be supporting this motion today. I will say at the outset I feel a little left out because the Greens have been advocating for decades and have been very consistent in our position that greyhound racing should be banned. So on the previous member's contribution and the fixation the previous member brought on Ms Purcell and the Animal Justice Party, please include the Greens in your promo speech next time as well.

The greyhound racing industry operates on a perpetual cycle of exploitation, animal cruelty and gambling-fuelled social harm. In pursuit of profit, greyhound breeding and training practices are exploitative, with dogs suffering under harsh conditions, suffering severe neglect, pain, injury and death. Most greyhounds killed in racing in Australia die here in Victoria, with the current on-track death toll at 39 – 18 more than any other state in this country. As Ms Purcell observed, that has gone up as recently as last night, with another dog meeting its fate on the track. Most dogs die from broken legs, from broken spines or from broken necks. At least 2551 greyhounds have been injured in Victoria on racetracks this year, and 450 of those were considered major injuries. In an effort to keep the death toll down – the published death toll – the industry only counts greyhound deaths that occur instantaneously either on impact or by euthanasia at the track as being on-track death.

We saw an egregious example of this sort of statistic being abused that was reported in the *Guardian* at the weekend. The vet suspected with this dog that a fracture had occurred. The dog was 12 months old, and the injury had been sustained at a training property, not during racing. The owners of this dog refused to pay for treatment, and they told the vet to euthanise the dog. Any dog that cannot race is not worth the money and the cost that it would incur to a trainer to feed them. Young healthy dogs are being euthanised because it does not fit the profit model for the owners of racing dogs to pay for vet bills and the upkeep and wellbeing of these dogs.

I ran a community stall out in our local dog park coincidentally last week, and we were speaking with dog owners there and asking them to sign up for our campaign to ban and end greyhound racing. I thought I would share some of the observations from local community members that we had during those conversations. Everyone we spoke to was visibly shocked to learn that of the 195 countries in the world only seven still allow greyhounds to be raced for profit. The US is the largest of those, and even there greyhound racing is banned in 49 states, and only two tracks remain in West Virginia. People had a look of horror on their face when they learned that injured or old greyhounds were called 'wastage' in the industry and that they were euthanised regularly. In relation to the good work done by greyhound rehoming programs there were a lot of assumptions challenged there. Most people that we spoke to assumed that there was a virtuous circle of greyhound adoption and that all old, injured or unwanted dogs were being adopted out of greyhound racing, so they were shocked to learn the truth – that most of the organisations that rehome greyhounds, despite their tireless work and hard work being done mostly by volunteers, only have the capacity to rehome one in six greyhound racing dogs in Australia. The remaining five out of six dogs are just considered wastage and euthanised.

The death grip that the gambling industry has on the greyhound industry cannot be overstated. The financial gain and the drive to maximise profits is superseding animal welfare. We do not forget that racing greyhounds also causes significant gambling harm to our communities. People are finding themselves trapped in a cycle of debt, despair and worse. Research from the Coroners Court of Victoria examined the Victorian suicide register, which showed in just a short time period from 2009 to 2016 at least 184 suicides were directly related to gambling and 17 other suicides were by affected others, such as family members.

What is worse is that out of all of this cruelty, all of this injury and all of this community and animal misery and pain, Victorian taxpayers are paying for it. The Parliamentary Budget Office found that the government is spending more than \$40 million a year propping up the state's lethal greyhound racing industry. During a cost-of-living crisis and a housing crisis Labor is choosing to spend \$40 million of public money propping up this cruel industry. Ms Purcell was the one who requested that costing from the Parliamentary Budget Office, and I thank her for doing that important work.

The social licence for greyhound racing is small and diminishing. Those involved in greyhound welfare tell us that there are significantly less trainers and less races than in past decades. The economics of this will eventually tip over, and we will catch up with the rest of the world, where communities are reclaiming dog and horse racing tracks for homes, for parks and for schools, but until that time the cruelty and the harm continues, and we could and should bring an end to greyhound racing now. The Greens' policies include a transition employment plan for trainers and other workers and to properly fund a welfare and rehoming plan for current racing greyhounds, which we can hear is just not even touching the sides of the need that is there. If this motion today is successful, what it will generate is factual and transparent reporting that is sorely missing – the actual number of injuries and deaths, the rates of euthanasia, the numbers being rehomed and the level of drugs being administered to dogs that are being raced as part of the greyhound industry. Of course the industry do not want this data reported and neither do some of their most enthusiastic backers over on the other side of the benches, but Labor too is complicit in the current practices of the greyhound racing industry, so I am very pleased to hear that the government will be supporting the motion today so that we can see increased transparency and accuracy around the actual impacts of this industry.

I predict that if more in the community understand the pain and carnage that lies behind every starting bell at every race, then racing's social licence will continue to diminish and eventually will evaporate. I also want to acknowledge the important work that is being done by volunteers, particularly those who are rehoming, working in fostering and introducing the actual animals that lie behind the numbers that we have been discussing and that this motion will bring forward. Every statistic is a living, breathing creature, and we deserve to know the kinds of impacts that this cruel industry is having. I commend Ms Purcell for bringing the motion. The Greens will be supporting it today.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:34): I rise today to contribute to Ms Purcell's motion on transparency in the greyhound racing industry, and I would first like to commend Ms Purcell's passion for animal rights in Victoria and her persistent advocacy. Speaking for those with no voice is always commendable.

Greyhound racing has been a long-existing institution in Victoria. The first races started in 1873, which makes it older than federation itself. We have come a long way since then, and it has grown into a major sport in Australia, now contributing in excess of \$643 million to the economy. The protections for greyhounds have grown alongside it. Greyhound Racing Victoria has a very clear record of continuous improvement in reporting key animal welfare data, especially concerning injuries and fatalities. The industry has strong protections, with strict regulations which govern how animals are treated on and off the field. This has led to Victoria having some of the strongest protections for greyhounds globally. As problems arise, new rules are put into place. In the past five years, the rate of fatal injury in races is down by 47 per cent and the longer term trend for race fatalities has come down from one in 1000 to 0.4 in just six years. The industry has grown from this scrutiny to be a better regulated sport.

As the Minister for Racing, my good friend Minister Carbines strives to ensure the integrity of all racing industries in Victoria, including greyhound racing. In 2022 Minister Carbines oversaw the establishment of a 24-hour facility to promote the integrity of both horse and greyhound racing, a major step in ensuring the health of all the animals involved. These facilities ensure that drug testing can be performed around the clock to help prevent doping. Our risk-based approach to this has helped enable the detection of substances, with over 10,000 swabs in the past year detecting around 70 samples, down from 103 the previous year.

Additionally, earlier this year in May Minister Carbinés announced the funding of a new greyhound-tracking system. This greyhound-tracking system goes to the heart of what this motion is really calling for – transparency in the greyhound racing industry and the assurance of greyhound welfare. The tracking system will be a game changer for the welfare of greyhounds in Victoria. The program is called the whole-of-life digital tracking program and is designed to expand protections for the welfare of greyhounds as well as the monitoring of those protections. With initial funding of \$2 million for its development, the whole-of-life digital tracking will ensure that the multimillion-dollar industry is operating at the level that it should be. Having transparent and detailed records is the first step in ensuring greyhounds are protected. It also ensures that if there are breaches of the code, it will be easier to track and punish those responsible. This is just a small part of our commitment to protecting greyhounds.

Greyhound racing maintains 4700 jobs. That is thousands of families that are relying on this industry to keep a roof over their heads. That does not include the countless others who are reliant on the tourism that the industry brings to this state. That tourism keeps countless restaurants and bars in our local community open. Whether it is the AFL, the Melbourne Cup or even the greyhound races, we attract people from all over the world to our sporting events.

With the size of this industry, it is important that it is supported with the best up-to-date technology. This is important not just for the punters but also for the greyhounds. Whole-of-life tracking will include details such as date of birth, microchipping, vaccination records and also notations on trainers and owners. This technology needs modern infrastructure around it, which is why the government has supported the modernisation of greyhound racing facilities to ensure a thorough history of racing greyhounds is recorded and accessible.

As we know, adoption is a big part of the greyhound industry, with over 2500 greyhounds rehomed in Victoria. It is an essential way the industry ensures former racing dogs have good quality of life even after their careers on the track. It can at times be difficult to adopt out all the retired dogs. Greyhound Racing Victoria has partnered with the Victorian government and Corrections Victoria for some time to run a prison outreach program with the Greyhound Adoption Program. This program allows Tarrengower Prison inmates to work with greyhounds in the training program to assist these dogs before they find new homes. The program is prolific, having recently reached a milestone of 600 dogs being rehabilitated and rehomed. The program is also beneficial to the inmates in Tarrengower as it offers them skills that they can use as they transition back into the community. Additionally, it helps dogs adjust to their new world after adoption, with the training program focusing greyhounds to adapt to certain stimuli, such as walking on a leash, loud appliances and other activities which they would not be used to, like walking up stairs.

Victoria is a place where everyone is protected, and that extends to animals. As long as there is a Labor government in power, we will strive to ensure that the safety of all animals is under the jurisdiction of the state. Since 2015 there have been two inquiries into greyhound racing, and of the collective 68 recommendations we have implemented 67. This government has introduced a range of measures over its time in office to ensure the protection of animals in this state. One of these measures came from an unexpected place of policy creation – rental reforms. In 2021 rental reforms made several notable changes to the landscape of renting in Victoria. With the housing crisis hitting Victoria hard we needed big changes to ensure a safer and better Victoria for renters. This meant many different amendments, such as a specification on what terms can and cannot be included in rental agreements and limits on unfair and unnecessary rental agreements. It additionally placed protections on Victorians that often are not considered when we talk about housing.

The Allan Labor government's pet census found that 58 per cent of Victorians own one or more pets. The census found that approximately 1.4 million pets lived in Victoria. That is 1.4 million pets also at risk of being impacted by the housing crisis. That is why this government introduced measures to give pets and their owners housing stability. In Victoria rental applicants are not to be discriminated against if the applicant discloses that they have a pet. This is to ensure more stability for families with pets and

will make navigating the rental market easier for pet owners. Of course if rental providers feel that a pet is inappropriate for the rental property they make an application through VCAT to protect their property. With nearly 3000 former racing greyhounds rehomed in the 2021–22 financial year alone, this rental reform will directly impact the quality of life for these greyhounds, and they will get to enjoy that in their new homes.

Greyhound adoption is incredibly important. If anyone here is considering adopting a dog, I would sincerely encourage them to adopt a greyhound. They are loving and caring dogs, and with the help of the Greyhound Adoption Program thousands of greyhounds are being rehomed with loving carers. Those carers can be renters, as I mentioned before, or they could be therapy service providers too. A great example of this is Tess, a therapy dog at Wandong Primary School out in northern Victoria. Tess is a greyhound dog who helps kids and parents who suffer from anxiety and bullying at school, and I am sure they are all very thankful for her.

Here in Victoria we have a range of options for greyhounds to be rehomed, whether it be through the Prison Pet program run in partnership with Corrections Victoria or the adoption program for the general public. This government is more than happy to support the rehoming of greyhounds. Racing is a well-regulated sport in this state, with strong protections against doping, as I have mentioned already, and provisions for transparency. I would like to touch on this point of transparency for a moment.

Transparency is an important cornerstone of democracy and the democratic process. This side of the house strongly believes in the net benefits of transparency given to all proceedings in society – governmental or not. As I mentioned earlier in my contribution, this government believes in the importance of a transparent greyhound racing industry, and I would like to reiterate the strides made earlier this year in implementing transparency measures for the industry. The whole-of-life tracking program will ensure that welfare is a major priority and that any potential abuse is caught and addressed. The government has protected greyhounds, and that will ensure that those protections are enforced.

At the same time the government is committed to building strong industries which attract people globally. Since coming into government we have been consistent with our support of a flourishing yet well-regulated greyhound racing industry. It brings tourism from all across country and generates well over half a billion dollars in economic activity in its own right each year. We have consistently supported measures that protect animal welfare, especially with regard to the management of injuries and with a comprehensive set of rehoming programs for greyhounds. The government will be, in that light, supporting this motion by Ms Purcell. The government have been a force for good change, and we will continue our commitment to protecting animals on and off the track.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:44): I rise to speak on this motion. I thank Ms Purcell for bringing it forward and acknowledge that her positions on these issues come from a good place, although I disagree with them. The motion makes a lot of claims about secrecy and accountability which are simply not accurate. The fact is Greyhound Racing Victoria, GRV, is already a leader amongst racing regulators in terms of transparency on the key welfare and integrity data that it reports. Healthy greyhounds cannot be and are not euthanised because they are too slow. It is about time that we were honest in this debate and stopped peddling this. GRV have a strong track record in detecting, investigating and prosecuting those that do the wrong thing, and it is a shame that we have to have the opposition defending the government-appointed GRV when the government will not. Any noncompliance with the rules regarding euthanasia is investigated by the integrity unit, with charges laid by the GRV for any serious breaches of the rules. All instances of euthanasia of GRV-registered greyhounds by a vet are reviewed. All healthy retired greyhounds must be rehomed or retained as pets by their owners or trainers. Indeed it has become quite the fashion in parts of my electorate to take a retired greyhound as a pet. I have many friends that do the same.

The industry as led by GRV should be commended for their commitment to improving standards. Over the past four years total injuries in Victorian greyhound races have dropped more than 8 per cent, down from 34.50 injuries per 1000 starters to 31.66 – 3.2 per cent of all starters in Victoria for the year. Last racing season more than 92 per cent of all racing injuries were deemed by the officiating on-track veterinarian to be non-serious. The injuries that were deemed as serious represent 2.46 injuries per 1000 starters, or 0.2 per cent of all starters, a figure down year on year. Fatality rates in Victorian races are down more than 47 per cent on five years ago. The long-term trend for race fatalities has seen the rate per 1000 starters come down by more than half, from around 1.0 per 1000 in 2017–18 to less than 0.4 per cent of all starters in 2023–24. That is a really great achievement. The integrity and welfare unit has also ramped up the number of greyhound property visits and inspections it conducts, with 2818 visits completed in the last year, up from 1711 in the prior financial year. This significant year-on-year increase demonstrates the commitment of GRV to ensure compliance with the rules of racing, the code of practice for the keeping of racing greyhounds and the standards for greyhound welfare.

It is worth noting that Ms Purcell's motion also calls on GRV to keep track of post-racing homes for every greyhound, an incredibly onerous burden that is not within their remit and would put excessive pressure on the body. Even if a retired greyhound is rehomed and then that person has to move away or there is a change in circumstances and they have to rehome the greyhound once again, that would mean GRV would have to follow that greyhound around for the rest of its life. This government cannot even keep track of children within state residential care, but it is supporting a motion which expects GRV to keep track of greyhounds for the rest of their life between several different owners. I mean, that is a seriously onerous burden.

Victoria is home to the largest and most successful greyhound racing jurisdiction in the world, conducting more than 15,000 races annually at 13 greyhound clubs across the state. And I will just touch on the Victorian racing industry: \$643 million in annual economic contribution to Victoria, two-thirds of which – \$420 million – is in regional Victoria, with over 4700 full-time equivalent jobs in Victoria and over 13,600 participants, support staff and volunteers in Victoria. The economic benefits are there for all to see. There are also a range of ancillary industries such as veterinary support, food supply and hospitality that are supported by the greyhound racing industry. The fact is that people seek to attack and denigrate this industry and do so on the basis of outdated and erroneous conceptions and convictions that simply do not reflect the greyhound industry of today. The trainers, the race holders, GRV and the industry only seek to look after the greyhounds in their care, and that is a respect I share. To quote the great Darryl Kerrigan of the iconic Australian film *The Castle*, greyhounds are 'noble animals, skinny and sleek and have a beautiful snout'.

We know this motion from the Animal Justice Party is just the thin end of the wedge for an extreme agenda. We know that the Animal Justice Party has a policy of ending all races, and as my colleague Ms Bath mentioned, that would include pony clubs, Olympic equestrian, the Melbourne Cup – every form of racing. That would devastate our state economically and also be really bad for our state and for people's enjoyable recreational activity.

I am very disappointed at the Labor Party's stance on this particular motion. The government appoints the board of GRV, and by supporting this motion the government is expressing a no-confidence vote in the board it appoints to look after the industry and to apply the existing rules and regulations, and so it is really disappointing of this government.

It would not be a speech about greyhounds for me if I did not talk about the Meadows greyhound track in my own electorate in Broadmeadows. Our fantastic track hosts over 104 greyhound race meets annually and more than 1000 races, and I am proud to have visited there on several occasions. The Meadows hosts the Australian Cup, Phoenix, Topgun, Hume Cup, Great Chase grand final, Silver cup and the Maturity Classic. Perhaps Mr Erdogan can come with me this year to the Phoenix in Broadmeadows. That would be fantastic. Over \$2 million in prize money is won and distributed among the owners of greyhounds raced at the Meadows under the Melbourne Greyhound Racing



Association. The lion's share of this prize money is actually offered by Greyhound Racing Victoria, with a significant contribution made by the MGRA.

In June this year I was proud to host at the Meadows a race named the Evan Mulholland MP Cup. It was a fantastic night, and it was great to join the former premier Denis Napthine and also my colleague, who I want to thank, the Shadow Minister for Racing Tim Bull. I want to congratulate the winner Follow the Band and trainer Rebecca Gibbons, who took out the Evan Mulholland MP Cup. I ran into lots of people at the Meadows that night – lots of people that were from Coolaroo, that were from Westmeadows, that were from Broadmeadows and that were from Jacana – and they came up to me to thank me for my support of the greyhound racing industry, because they had seen speeches from me supporting the industry previously. The people in these areas are not unaware of how the Labor Party votes in this place, of how the Labor Party is offering explicit support to this motion, which we know is the thin edge of the wedge for the industry. They want to see their politicians from major parties wholeheartedly supporting greyhound racing, and that is exactly what I will do in this place.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:54): I rise to speak on this motion on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. In my office there is a member of my team who goes by the name Sparky, short for Sparkle Star Cupcake. Sparky is a bit different from the rest of them, and it is not just his fabulous name; Sparky is a rescue sighthound. He is the sweetest little guy. He is always watching us work and never leaves our sides unless we throw a tennis ball down the hallway. Despite a rough start in life, Sparky is now lucky to have a really wonderful life with people who love him dearly, but unfortunately many of his sighthound siblings are not so lucky. They continue to be exploited, hurt, traumatised and killed by the greyhound industry in Victoria.

We know that Victoria leads the nation in on-track greyhound deaths. This year the death toll is at 38 so far, and at least 2551 have been injured. But we do not have a full picture of the real extent of the industry's damage because of the way that the data is reported. That is why this motion is so important. This motion proposes changes to the Greyhound Racing Victoria annual report which will provide greater transparency on the state of the industry and how we can make change for the better.

Dogs that do not die on the track or are not immediately euthanised are not included in the fatality data. That means that a greyhound who is injured on the track but only succumbs to those injuries days later is not counted as a fatality. The way data is collected currently underestimates the harms of the greyhound racing industry. We owe it to these dogs to change this. The 10-day window following a race, training or trial proposed in this motion will ensure we understand the true number of dogs killed off track and why. When living, breathing animals are treated as a quick cash grab, we must be equipped to deal with the reality of trainers putting dogs down when they are no longer profitable.

This motion also proposes positive changes that would expand the data relating to the use of prohibited substances and rehoming. Given the recent uptick in prohibited substance use, this data is essential to appropriately respond to this issue.

This industry is unsustainable and cruel, and that is why the additional data will help us review this information. The current rate of greyhound breeding in Australia is six times the industry rehoming organisation's capacity. The suite of improvements to data reporting in this motion is critical to ensuring the highest level of oversight for this industry. In a modern world where there are so many alternatives, it is heartbreaking to see the continued use of animals in the gambling industry.

Then there is the absolute hypocrisy that is a government standing in this place and championing how they are preventing and responding to gambling harms, all while they continue to prop up the greyhound racing industry. Thanks to the great work of Ms Purcell and the Parliamentary Budget Office we know that over four years this government will dedicate \$90 million to propping up the greyhound racing industry. I hope they will support this motion so that we can understand just how prevalent these harms are and maybe review the fact that we are investing taxpayers money into a greyhound racing industry.

It is my hope that every greyhound in this state will find a home, like our little friend Sparky, where they race down the hallways chasing balls for fun and not for profit. The more greyhounds that go on to live lazy lives in retirement the better. Legalise Cannabis Victoria supports this motion and congratulates Ms Purcell on her tireless advocacy for our greyhound friends.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (11:58): I do not support this motion.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:58): In the brief time that we have, I would firstly like to state that the Libertarian Party does not oppose the greyhound racing industry. We do not seek to interfere with it or shut it down, and we recognise it as a legitimate sporting activity. However, at its core what this motion is referring to is enhanced reporting requirements, so what we are saying here is that if the industry wants to take taxpayer subsidies, then they should be reporting back to the taxpayers on how those subsidies are being used. Therefore we consider this a quite minor requirement on welfare, because there are many taxpayers that are concerned about this. So we will not be opposing this motion.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Country Fire Authority**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:00): (685) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. During the recent flood inquiry we heard from numerous CFA brigades about the difficulty they are having in attracting and retaining volunteers. This impacts the CFA's ability to respond in a time of crisis. Can the minister detail what work the government is doing to help attract and retain new volunteers to join the CFA, especially brigades that are currently experiencing low membership?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:00): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her question. It is a really important issue, and I thank you for your ongoing support of the CFA. I know you are deeply engaged in Northern Victoria and have a lot to do with the brigades that turn out day in, day out to protect country Victorians in our shared electorate. In good news, Mrs Tyrrell, in relation to volunteer numbers, we are seeing an increase across the CFA. The sector has consistently maintained a dedicated pool of over 50,000 hardworking and committed volunteers. That number is currently just shy of 52,000. Importantly, there have been more than 2500 operational volunteers that have joined the CFA since January this year.

What you see quite regularly off the back of periods where you experience emergencies is that it re-engages the community, it turns their minds to the importance of those that turn out to protect them. Often when I am speaking to new volunteers I ask what motivated them, and it is because they have seen others responding to emergencies and feel a sense of obligation to their community as well. So that is just one way of attracting volunteers.

The other way is – you recently would have seen at country shows around the area and indeed at the Melbourne Show that they are always on display, having the volunteers there talking to the community, talking to the public about coming and having a try at the station – ‘Come and hear what it's about.’ Not every volunteer needs to get on a truck. Whether it is the CFA or the SES, there are many roles for volunteers to play, so it is getting that message out that if you might be hesitant about putting on a suit and getting on a truck, that is not the only way that you can be part of a really fantastic organisation. They are really important messages as well to get more and more people through the door.

I have got to say the other way to attract new volunteers is investment – investment in new trucks, investment in infrastructure. One of the things I like to promote when I get to visit a brigade or a unit that is receiving a new piece of appliance is thanking the media for attending, because I am not actually there for a picture opportunity for myself but for the opportunity to get it out into the broader community about new investment, the opportunity to thank the volunteers and importantly remind

people that there is an opportunity, if you have got spare time, to come down and have a look at your new station or check out a new truck.

There are also obviously media buys and campaigns in relation to fire awareness, which we hope also have the added benefit of promoting the need for more people to get involved in this important way to protect their community or support their community through the emergency services. You know, it is always competing with people that are attracted to footy clubs and netball clubs and the like, but joining your local CFA is something that I would always promote. There is a lot of crossover of volunteers in country areas. There are some brigades that are having trouble attracting and retaining volunteers, and that is something that I am working with the CFA on constantly. But in good news, as I said, there are waiting lists in some areas.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:03): I thank the minister for her reply. Last week I met with the captain of the Emerald CFA, who detailed the recent success of the brigade in recruiting and retaining new volunteers. Will the minister consider implementing a mentoring program between different CFA brigades so that those with high memberships can help brigades suffering membership shortages to recruit and retain new volunteers?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:04): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her suggestion. It is something I would be more than happy to speak to the CFA about. They have a lot of engagement and networking opportunities, but I will ask what they would say in relation to your idea and come back to you.

#### Department of Justice and Community Safety

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:04): (686) My question is to the Attorney-General. Thousands of Department of Justice and Community Safety staff have been told to undertake expanded cultural awareness training, including a module titled ‘White privilege training’. Will the Attorney personally intervene to ensure that this divisive training module, which discriminates on race, is withdrawn?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:04): Mr Mulholland, I reject the premise of your question and do not really appreciate the tone of your question either, but I will answer your question. I am advised that the module that you have referred to is optional for all staff. Aboriginal cultural awareness training is about making sure that the workplace is culturally safe and inclusive for Aboriginal Victorians, and it is something that I have actually encouraged members of this chamber to perhaps consider taking up given some of the commentary we get, particularly in committee stages of legislation. My department provides a range of training to support the staff to build their understanding of matters that impact Aboriginal people to create a justice system that helps improve outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians and community and provide, as I said, a culturally safe, inclusive workplace. DJCS is very proud to deliver Aboriginal cultural awareness training. They have recently expanded their offering to ensure a wide range of topics are available for justice staff. I am very proud of the employees within the department of justice because it is a very popular program to be engaged in.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:06): Attorney, the white privilege training module is part of the Department of Justice and Community Safety’s treaty education program. What is the total cost of the program to date? Does your department brief have the cost in there?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:06): Mr Mulholland, important investment in training across the public service is something that we should never shy away from. What I would point to is that in relation to training within the department of justice it is delivered within the operational base funding of the department. And it is something, as I have said, that I am particularly proud of. What I would like to point to is our commitment in the department of justice of achieving savings targets over four years. I have been in this place –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaelyn SYMES:** You like to ignore me when I talk to you about policies and procedures. The target reducing –

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, it was a clear question on the training module and the cost of that training module, and I would ask you to bring the Attorney back to the question.

**The PRESIDENT:** The issue I have with questions like this is that there are precedents from previous presidents that state the expectation of a minister to have a certain degree of detail and that it should not be expected. I think the minister is being relevant to the question.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I answered the question in relation to the training requirements or the training expenditure being included in the operational budget of the department of justice. As I have outlined in my substantive answer, Mr Mulholland, the module that you have referred to is optional. I have not received advice in relation to the take-up, and I would actually encourage people to take up any training that involves the ability to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

#### **Ministers statements: apprentices and trainees**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:08): The Allan Labor government is committed to enhancing support, safety and fairness for apprentices and trainees across Victoria. We know too many apprentices have faced unsafe work practices, inadequate training, bullying and bad workplace culture. That is why we established the apprenticeships taskforce, who have released their report into Victoria's apprenticeship system. This morning I joined the Treasurer to announce the government's official response to this report, along with a \$9 million package of supports. I was also joined by Sharan Burrow, the chair of the taskforce, and Amanda Threlfall from Trades Hall. The apprentices who were there were Audrey, Lucas, Jess, Lucy and Ben, and there were a whole raft of organisations connected to the apprenticeship system. I thank all the members of the taskforce for their work and all apprentices and trainees who contributed to the report. Today was the culmination of years of work of advocacy and, most importantly, of cooperation between unions, employers and the government. This package will establish a single one-stop shop help desk service for apprentices, trainees and employers.

We have also announced a new mental health program, and it will be an adjunct to the employee assistance program. Helping apprentices navigate the challenges that they face in their personal and professional lives, the taskforce and our response to its recommendations demonstrate our commitment to supporting Victoria's 77,000 apprentices and trainees. We are doing this because we understand that vocational education and training is an engine that improves economic and social equality. More importantly, this Labor government understands that apprentices, like all workers, are people – people with lives, hopes, families and dreams that deserve respect, safety, security and dignity. Only a Labor government will take action to improve fairness, safety and respect for apprentices.

#### **Medically supervised injecting facilities**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:10): (687) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Two recent reports, Penington's *Australia's Annual Overdose Report* and the coroner's Victorian overdose deaths report, revealed shocking figures about fatal overdose in Geelong. For the past decade Geelong has recorded the highest number of unintentional overdose deaths of any Victorian regional area and has amongst the highest rates in the state. Meanwhile the frequency with which potent synthetic opioids like nitazenes have been present during such fatalities has been growing, almost doubling annually since January 2021, significantly increasing the likelihood of unintentional and fatal overdose. Minister, will you consider establishing an MSIR in Geelong?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:11): Thank you very much, Dr Mansfield, for your question and for your

advocacy in relation to these issues. Obviously it is a very challenging set of circumstances that we find in the illicit drug market at the moment, and we have seen the volatility of the illicit drug market increase quite rapidly, quite quickly. Our government has made a series of very clear announcements about how we will tackle the rise of nitazenes and other synthetic opioids in the illicit drug market. Next sitting week we are going to be debating the pill-testing bill, which will obviously not only have a significant strengthening effect on our drug alert and intelligence system, but it will also save lives as we stand up both the fixed site in the middle of next year and start the process for our festival testing at the end of this year. So I look forward to that debate, and I am sure there will be a lot of questions in committee about all of these matters.

But in relation to the specific challenges in the community of Geelong, you would be aware that we have recently opened a fantastic mental health and AOD hub in the centre of Geelong. Together with Barwon Health and other key health providers, that service will be able to significantly boost the AOD services available to the community. I do not want to pre-empt the bill debate next sitting week, but we have also sought to increase the availability of naloxone across the community, so not only will we have naloxone available through our needle and syringe programs and our community health services, we will also of course be rolling out some additional availability through vending machines, which is part of the legislation that we will be bringing forward to the Council next week, should it pass the Assembly today.

We of course also have a number of initiatives in the statewide action plan to reduce drug harm which are relevant for regional communities, including Geelong, which I know you are familiar with. But we have made our position clear on the medically supervised injecting service being located in North Richmond, and the government has been clear that we have no plans to increase the number of safe injecting services in the state.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:14): I thank the minister for her response. Minister, one of the justifications provided by your government for not establishing a second MSIR in Melbourne was that 90 per cent of injecting drug use occurs outside of Melbourne's CBD, including a significant proportion in regional areas like Geelong – Geelong in particular. People who inject drugs in Geelong are not going to travel to a supervised injecting facility in Richmond or even Melbourne's CBD. We need those facilities where people are using drugs, and it is clear there is a need in Geelong. So why aren't regional Victorians like those in Geelong being given the same access to an MSIR as their metro counterparts?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:15): I thank Dr Mansfield for her supplementary question. We have been talking through these issues for a while now, and I think we have been very clear about the government's position on this. We see the North Richmond safe injecting service forming a really important part of our whole ecosystem of AOD services across the state. I would also add that in terms of the increasing dangers of synthetic opioids entering the market, we are in the process of setting up a ministerial advisory committee of experts in the field so that we can ensure that I, as the minister, and the department are getting the most appropriate advice on how to tackle these challenges. We have also recently finalised recruitment for the state's first chief addiction medicine officer, who will sit within Safer Care Victoria.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can I acknowledge that former member of this chamber Philip Davis is in the gallery.

### Child protection

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): (688) My question is for the Minister for Children. Minister, the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, OVIC, found in its recent investigation that a child protection worker had used ChatGPT to draft a protection application report for the court. OVIC has subsequently issued a compliance notice requiring your department to ban the

use of generative artificial intelligence by child protection staff by 24 September. Minister, can you confirm that OVIC's direction has been complied with?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:17): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. I would at the outset also make the point that the department actually referred the matter to OVIC in the first instance. On such advice OVIC has looked at the matter, and the department is acting on the recommendations of OVIC.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:17): Thank you very much for that answer, Minister. It is an important issue – very concerning what happened. Can you guarantee therefore that all child protection documentation potentially drafted using ChatGPT or other AI tools has been fully identified, given what you have just explained to the house and that OVIC has highlighted difficulties in distinguishing AI-generated content from existing practice deficiencies within the work unit?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:18): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question. It is a perfectly valid question, and I have asked the same question of the department myself. I have been assured on the advice of the department – and I am not a technical person; anyone who knows me well knows that using Facebook and email is the limit of my technological abilities – on the use of AI in a range of forms, from diary entry predictions through to ChatGPT; I have to keep reminding myself what it is actually called. But the advice that I have had is that the operations of child protection are very much taking the recommendations of OVIC seriously, and the advice that I have is that they are implementing them to the requirements of OVIC. Of course across the whole of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing there remains the use of automated AI, if you like, through things like diaries et cetera. But in terms of what I think is the genesis and the point of your question in relation to sensitive child protection information around particular individual cases, the advice of OVIC is absolutely being taken seriously and implemented. That is the advice that I have been given by the secretary.

#### **Ministers statements: housing workforce**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:19): Providing and supporting access to safe and permanent housing is really essential to dignity, security, connection and the opportunity to thrive. Last week at the 2024 Public Housing Forum and Workforce Awards it was a joy and a privilege to acknowledge and celebrate the outstanding dedication, expertise and achievements across our public housing workforce. There were so many amazing stories that came out of the awards, and I congratulate all of the award nominees and those who I was able to speak with and meet on the day.

In the interests of time, here are a few notable stories that I want to bring to the attention of the house. The Goulburn client support and housing team played a really pivotal role in transforming the life of a resident who faced and was living with very complex mental health challenges, cancer and the removal of his children due to unsafe living conditions, and over six years the team worked tirelessly to support him through home clean-up, engagement with mental health services and family reunification. The team encouraged him to start volunteering by maintaining gardens, which grew into his own business, and he is now a registered contractor for the department, assisting other renters and residents with complex needs.

Paul and Rob, the dynamic field services officer duo at Yarra housing, are responsible for maintaining approximately 4700 properties across the Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond estates. Despite the demands, they continuously deliver really exceptional maintenance services, working with housing teams, residents and stakeholders. With Paul's extensive public housing experience and Rob's background as a building contractor, they are really effectively addressing maintenance challenges, and their efforts have led to improved maintenance services. Managing the latest and the largest housing portfolio in the northern division, they continue to exceed expectations through their dedication, teamwork and unwavering commitment to the wellbeing of residents.

There are so many more amazing stories that I could share, but I congratulate all award nominees and winners. Every single one of you has made a significant and enduring contribution, and I extend my thanks to all of you for your commitment to achieving positive outcomes for residents.

### Hunters for the Hungry

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:21): (689) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Agriculture. Last year this house passed a motion to help end hunger for vulnerable homeless Victorians, being Hunters for the Hungry. To date this seems to have stalled despite the house's support. My question is: what is the hold-up?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:22): I thank Mr Bourman for his question for Minister Spence, and I will get an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:22): I thank the Attorney-General for her passing on the question. My supplementary is: the game meat barbecue will be held here on 14 November; will the minister make a public statement of support for the Hunters for the Hungry on that date?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:22): You can probably just go and ask her, but I will pass the message through the chamber to her chamber and back to you.

### Youth justice system

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:22): (690) My question is for the Minister for Youth Justice. The media has reported that last Friday two inmates at Parkville youth justice centre held a female guard captive while holding a shiv to her throat. Given this is another serious incident, how many investigations is your department currently undertaking into violent assaults against staff who work in the youth justice system?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:23): I thank Mr Davis for his question and his interest in our youth justice system. From the outset I might just take this opportunity to express my deepest sympathy for the staff member involved. We know incidents such as these can be quite traumatic, especially for the staff. As the minister, I have had the great privilege of meeting many of the staff that work in our custodial settings, whether that be in youth justice or in our adult system, and I am always amazed by their dedication and professionalism and their commitment to making a difference to the people in custodial settings. They really are the front line of our community safety response, and I want to thank each and every one of them.

In relation to the incident last week, I will say from the outset I cannot really get into the detail of individual matters for a whole range of reasons, and that incident has been referred to Victoria Police. Every worker deserves to feel safe and be safe in their work environment, and matters like these we take very seriously in youth justice settings. Victoria Police is the appropriate body where there has been criminal behaviour.

In relation to incidents in the youth justice system, they are reported in the usual way, and there is a process.

**David Davis:** How many?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** There are a number. They are reported at the end of every financial year. Mr Davis, I recommend that at the end of this financial year those incidents will be reported in the usual way.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:24): It is a very simple question. The minister could have given us the number if he chose to, and if he could not give it to us now, he could have come

back with the number. He knows it or he can obtain it. As a supplementary question I ask: as of 31 March 2024 there were 23 staff in the youth justice system on WorkCover, many of whom have been subjected to violence by inmates; how many staff are on WorkCover today?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:25): I thank Mr Davis for his supplementary question. As I said in my substantive, any assault on one of our staff is unacceptable and these matters are referred to Victoria Police and are being investigated by Victoria Police. Mr Davis, it seems you have some of the figures in terms of WorkCover claims. They will be disclosed in the usual format –

**David Davis:** I have got the March figure, but I am after the up-to-date figure.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** The March figure – that is right. They will be updated in the usual process. This is how government works. I know you have been out of government for a long time, but we will report in the usual process. There is the PAEC process. I know Mr McGowan and Mrs McArthur were at PAEC. There is the process of annual reports published in relation to these matters, and they will be reported in the usual way.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, this was a very direct question that the minister has been asked – or PAEC has been asked, the Parliament has been asked – before, and it is a very simple question. If you cannot provide it, just bring it to the house tomorrow.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will call the minister back to the question. The minister has finished.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister is effectively defiantly saying he will not provide the number. That is what he is saying. He can provide the number. He can get it. He has indicated that it is a number that he can obtain. Why is he not providing it?

**Harriet Shing:** On the point of order, President, Mr Davis knows full well that a minister cannot be directed as to how a question should be answered, and Mr Davis's supplementary question had a preamble that was longer, perhaps, than the future and the prospects of the current Leader of the Opposition in the other place.

**Georgie Crozier:** On the point of order, President, this is question time. We have got legitimate questions to ask of the government, and for the minister to give a frivolous point of order – the minister has continually failed to answer the question, and we would ask that it be reinstated by you. It is a simple request. It is a simple question.

**David Davis:** Further to the point of order, President, the minister alluded to the preamble. Now, the preamble is a single sentence that gave –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**David Davis:** No, in the supplementary. It was a single sentence that dealt with 23 staff on 31 March – so the figures are obtainable – and then it simply asks how many staff are on WorkCover today.

**The PRESIDENT:** If I can cover all the points of order and further points of order, a minister cannot be directed how to answer a question and the preamble does form part of the question. But in saying that, there is provision at the end of question time where I can determine whether a minister should supply a written response in line with the standing orders. I do not like to pre-empt, but I think in this case I will ask Mr Erdogan to do that in line with the standing orders. But in saying that, I have this concern. I have a number of concerns. I have a concern about asking a minister something in a level of detail that they should not reasonably be expected to know. I think this is probably not within that concern, but I have had a concern for a number of weeks where a supplementary question asks for a lot of detail for an answer that has got 1 minute. So I am going to take those things into consideration for a future, perhaps, ruling or conversation with the Procedure Committee. I think we have acquitted all of that.



**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:29): I move:

That the minister's answer be taken into account on the next day of the meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ministers statements: Dr Colleen Pearce**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:30): I rise to update the house on the retirement of the Victorian public advocate Dr Colleen Pearce AM. Last Thursday I had the pleasure of attending Dr Pearce's retirement function to acknowledge her 17 years of service and celebrate her achievements in the role. As the fourth appointed public advocate and Victoria's first female public advocate, Dr Pearce has brought her considerable experience and skills along with a deep sense of empathy and compassion to the role.

Her tenure as public advocate came at a time when we have seen momentum building for fairer and more empowering policy and services for people with disability. In this context it has been a time when the advocacy and voice that the Office of the Public Advocate provides has been especially important, with fairness, justice and reform for people with disability rightly receiving much more attention. Last year the OPA celebrated 35 years of the community visitor program. Dr Pearce has been passionate about allowing the community, through this volunteer-led program, to learn about the situations of people in supported accommodation and mental health facilities and to provide a voice for people who may not always feel heard. Under the leadership of Dr Pearce, the community visitor program has continued to show us how important it is to improve policy, programs and services so that people with disability can access the support they need and deserve. Dr Pearce and her team have made a huge contribution to driving real reform and change in Victoria in promoting and protecting the rights of people with disability.

At the national level the OPA and Dr Pearce's active participation and contribution to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability can be seen in the commission's reflections and recommendations. In addition to OPA's multiple submissions, Dr Pearce appeared at four hearings and participated in a round table on best practice models of guardianship. There is no doubt that Dr Pearce's input into the commission and to the NDIS review will have a continued impact on our next phases of work. On behalf of the Victorian government, I thank Dr Pearce for her frank and fearless advice, for her 17 years of service and for her outstanding contribution to community services in Victoria.

**Housing**

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:32): (691) My question is to the Minister for Housing. An overarching principle in Infrastructure Victoria's *Opportunities to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions of Infrastructure* is to:

Prioritise non-build or low build solutions.

And they go on to state:

Aim to get better use from existing infrastructure or modify it to meet changing needs before considering a new build.

This recommendation was reiterated in Infrastructure Victoria's submission to the climate resilience inquiry. In relation to the demolition of 44 public housing towers and the construction of their replacements, what consideration was given to modifying the existing structures, specifically in the context of the government's target to reduce emissions by at least 75 per cent by 2035?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:33): Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for that question. What I will do, given the level of granularity in your question, is perhaps offer you an opportunity for us to have a discussion about materials, recycling and alternatives to deconstruction or demolition. In many instances we will see

that there are only limited opportunities to repurpose or to recycle materials, as much as anything because those materials in a structural sense will lack the integrity to be able to be weight bearing or to be used or redeployed in another setting involving large-scale infrastructure construction.

However, it is really important to note that, across a number of the housing builds that Homes Victoria and that Development Victoria have also been progressing, recycled and repurposed materials are at the heart of a lot of the decisions and planning that go into making sure that wherever and however possible the footprint and emissions are part of what can be done to deliver on better and more sustainable outcomes for people, not just those who will end up calling these homes their own but also for the broader community around emissions reduction and the targets that we have set – again, the most ambitious in Australia. We are really committed to making sure that we do have sustainability at the heart of our housing delivery and the sorts of programs that we have announced and funded to a record extent in Victoria.

Mr Ettershank, one of the challenges that we have around the 44 housing towers is that their structural integrity is able only in very limited ways to be repurposed or retrofitted. When we are talking about the sorts of issues around retrofitting we do, again, call upon a very significant volume of material in order to address compliance with contemporary standards. And this would result, again, not in additional housing stock; we would see a reduction, which would require the build of additional social housing elsewhere. We would also need to relocate every single resident from those towers while the retrofitting was taking place. We have undertaken an incredible amount of maintenance and upgrades, including within existing towers, over many, many years, but the towers themselves are getting to the end of their useful life. They do not comply with contemporary standards. This is where, to the best extent possible – with safety being the driving priority of what we can do within new builds – this is part of the work that we do. We do it across a number of different portfolios.

As you would be aware, Mr Ettershank, the work on new builds also includes a range of sustainable initiatives that are energy efficient and also consistent with our broader policy objectives on emissions reduction over time. But as I said, I am very happy to have a conversation with you about what the overall footprints and impacts look like around emissions reduction.

**David Ettershank:** I thank the minister for her response, and I will leave it there. I look forward to the briefing.

### Regional infrastructure

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:36): (692) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. The last round of applications for the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, designed to support and grow regional communities, closed at 11:59 on 17 August 2022. Minister, why has this fund been closed?

**Gayle Tierney:** Sorry, what fund was that?

**The PRESIDENT:** Minister, do you want that question repeated?

**Gayle Tierney:** Yes, can I have it repeated? I thought it was a different fund.

**The PRESIDENT:** Ms Bath, would you mind repeating the question?

**Melina BATH:** You need some more time? Okay. The last round of applications for the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, designed to support and grow regional communities, closed at 11:59 on 17 August 2022. Why has this fund been closed, Minister?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:37): First of all, you are talking about a grant round. Can I say from the outset that regional Victoria is a fantastic place to live, work and visit, and we will continue to listen to regional communities and back projects that matter to local families in regional communities. We will continue to do that. That is what we are doing, and it is clearly reflected in the recent funding announcement I

made with the Premier last Friday, along with the local member Jaclyn Symes. This is part and parcel of what we do. We listen to the community. If there are fantastic projects that people want to put forward, whether they are councils or indeed other community organisations, we are all ears to hear, because we have spent \$45 billion since 2014 in rural and regional Victoria.

In the most recent round we have made sure the contribution that goes to regional Victoria is actually more than what the population is in regional Victoria. On top of that, we have made sure that we have had that funding stream that enables us to not only house workers in regional Victoria but also improve our tourism offering so that our local communities can economically benefit from people staying in local accommodation and spending their money on food as well as the attractions. And that is exactly what we are doing with the \$126 million Twelve Apostles redevelopment. We are also doing that through the Geelong City Deal for the project of the convention centre at Geelong, with \$416 million. That is going to prove to be a real game changer for regional Victoria.

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, President, my question specifically relates to the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund – it specifically relates to that – and the minister is not answering the question.

**Harriet Shing:** On the point of order, President, the minister's first sentence literally answered the question about this being a grants process, and she has continued with context from there.

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister has been relevant in her answer.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I will continue to talk about the fantastic investment that we continue to make in this fantastic state. We have close to \$300 million over the next 12 months that we will deliver to regional Victoria, marking the portfolio's biggest investment in recent years and particularly since the pandemic. I think that is particularly interesting to note. And it is not just in terms of Tiny Towns, it is not just in terms of RWAV; there are 650 projects that RDV is actually delivering in regional Victoria, something that we are particularly proud of.

What we have is a vision and a focus in RDV, one that is putting economic development back into regional development, that is about working with different agencies across government so that we can ensure that the best possible outcomes are delivered for regional Victoria. And we have got a close relationship with agriculture – that speaks for itself.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:41): I might share some facts with the minister. Minister, regional Victoria is home to 25 per cent of our population. Sadly, the independent Parliamentary Budget Office has confirmed that the Allan Labor government is spending 13 per cent of Victoria's total asset investment in regional development – in regional communities, Minister. Under your watch, why do regional Victorians continue to miss out on their fair share?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:41): Obviously Ms Bath was not listening to part of my answer to the substantive question. Our latest budget invests 28 per cent of place-based expenditure in our regions. That is more than what the actual population is in regional Victoria. And we will continue to make sure that regional Victorians are supported in the activities that they undertake. But more importantly, we are about making sure that we facilitate investment, and that is why I am making sure that we have people with an economic and industry background on our regional partnerships. That is why I have asked for the CEOs of our regional TAFEs to be in our regional partnerships. That is why we are making sure that Invest Victoria is very much part and parcel of what we are doing on the ground in regional Victoria, so that we can deliver exports as well as huge investments in regional Victoria that can deal with the issues that we have got today while also having a vision for the future.

#### **Ministers statements: bushfire preparedness**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:43): Talking about country Victoria, many of the issues I want to brief the chamber on today affect country Victorians, because I want to update the house on the extensive work that our emergency services

organisations are doing to ensure that we are as prepared as possible for the upcoming high-risk season. Each year climate change creates new risks, extending the length of the season, the frequency of events and the crossing over of seasons and potentially elevating the severity when a fire or flood does occur. It means that we need to plan carefully.

Last week I was briefed by the State Control Centre by agencies on how they have prepared ahead of the high-risk weather season. It included the CFA, FRV, Forest Fire Management, Life Saving Victoria, the Bureau of Meteorology, Victoria Police, Triple Zero Victoria and the emergency management commissioner. This attendance is of course reflective of what happens in an emergency. When there is a crisis, our emergency services sector work as one. It is a truly incredible undertaking of team effort.

I am confident that going into the high-risk season our agencies are prepared to keep Victorians safe. As I was referring to with Mrs Tyrrell earlier, we are just shy of having 52,000 dedicated CFA volunteers ready to respond to fires this summer. It is an increase of volunteer numbers compared to last year. Our government is supporting our first responders with access to a world-class aerial fleet, with details of the fleet to be announced soon. I am going to pre-empt, for the benefit of the chamber: there is no reduction in the aerial fleet as compared to the year before. I am sure I will be repeating that several times – but anyway.

I would like to thank the hardworking Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services for her engagement and joining me in thanking our hardworking emergency services staff and volunteers for the work that they are doing to prepare for the season ahead. This is of course a timely reminder that preparedness is a shared responsibility between emergency services and the community.

Let us remind all our country communities, in particular the peri-urban, to download the VicEmergency app, prepare their homes and make their fire plans. Do your part so that agencies can do theirs. And a reminder that at lunchtime there is a briefing for non-government MPs on the fire preparedness season in your opposition party room.

### **Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:45): Minister Symes will get Mr Bourman answers to both his questions to the Minister for Agriculture within the standing orders. I will ask Minister Erdogan to, within the standing orders, respond in writing to Mr Davis's questions. The supplementary is a concern, but I think if I am asking you for the substantive I will ask you for the supplementary as well, with consideration of the level of detail, as I said.

### ***Constituency questions***

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): (1149) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. How is the Labor government helping families of the Southern Metro Region with the cost of participation in sporting activities? Many kids love sport. For many it is the highlight of their week. Recently I was down at Shipston Reserve talking to the Bayside Argonauts Football Club about the soaring participation in their sport. But we know cost-of-living pressures are affecting families, and often it is these extracurricular activities that miss the cut. That is why the Labor government's Get Active Kids vouchers program is offering \$200 for eligible families towards the cost of sports memberships and registration fees, so parents can continue to support their kids participating in community sport without affecting the household budget. Almost 150,000 kids active vouchers have been provided to families since the program launched, with the latest round set to distribute thousands more. More than a half of the families who received the vouchers said their kids would not have been able to participate in sport without them. The Labor government is helping families with household costs.

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:47): (1150) My question is to the Minister for Police, and I ask: is the government considering the use of water cannons for crowd control at demonstrations as called for by former police chief commissioner Kel Glare? The respect for police has been lost in this state, as further evidenced after an anonymous collective, alleged to be a pro-Palestinian group of protesters, squared off with police outside a weapons manufacturer in my electorate in the south-eastern suburbs. More than 70 protesters wearing masks, goggles and headscarves were forced back by mounted police after swarming outside AW Bell in Dandenong South in August. Water cannons have been used to control badly behaved and unruly demonstrators at rallies, and water cannons are actually going to save the taxpayer \$20 million as they are only \$10 million and it cost \$30 million at that rally to control the people. So we ask whether the minister is actually considering the use of water cannons.

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1151) My question is to the Minister for Planning. The former VicRoads site at Kew in my electorate is a sizeable piece of public land at 2.67 hectares. It is very close to the city, with both excellent public transport and green spaces nearby. The government has previously flagged its intentions to simply flog this site off to private developers, with no public housing and no social housing requirements on the site, the only caveat being that 10 per cent would be earmarked for affordable housing – but we all know that affordable housing is defined as being 10 per cent below the market rate, and we know that at the moment in particular most people cannot afford that. The lack of ambition by this government to tackle real housing solutions is astounding. Given the generational housing crisis we find ourselves in, a site like this should be used for public housing. The current waiting list is sitting at more than 100,000 people, which is likely to balloon even further as this Labor government wants to knock down 44 public housing towers, which currently house more than 10,000 people. Minister, why won't you allocate the VicRoads land in Kew to public housing?

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1152) My question is for the Minister for Environment. How will students in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region benefit from the current round of Victorian junior landcare and biodiversity grants? Knox Gardens Primary School has been awarded a \$3590 grant under this program to support their 'Save our indigenous flora' project. This project aims to preserve native plant species within the local area, providing students with hands-on experience in environmental conservation and fostering a deeper understanding of biodiversity. It is initiatives like these that help to instil a sense of responsibility and connection to our landscape and environment in our younger generations by fostering this community spirit of environmental stewardship and sustainability. Minister, how will students in my region benefit from this program?

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1153) It is banana day today, and it is probably quite appropriate that it is banana day because if you have been listening to anything I have been saying in this place for quite some time, you will also know I am very passionate about toilets. In fact there is a toilet I am very passionate about, and that is one at Ringwood East train station. I am yet to earn the right to have a toilet, and so too are the people of Ringwood, Mitcham, Nunawading, Croydon and so forth. We are yet to have a toilet. This might sound like a Monty Python skit. I was up at Ringwood East train station just on the weekend, and to my great horror one of the shop owners pointed something out to me. It had missed my attention previously, which is very sad. There was a brochure, and the minister, Minister Pearson, had made a terrific announcement – I think he thought it was a terrific announcement – that a 2.5-metre by 2-metre turtle sculpture would adorn the new train station. So here we have a 2.5-metre by 2-metre turtle, and we cannot get one simple train station toilet.

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My very simple question for Minister Danny Pearson is: how much does the turtle cost, and can we please have a toilet instead?

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, President, I would be very curious to know from Mr McGowan what this has to do with bananas.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is not a point of order. Well, you might as well respond.

**Nick McGOWAN:** My great fear is this: on banana day, the minister has gone completely bonkers and mad, and he has become a banana. Having become a banana, I am now left with a turtle instead of a toilet.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am glad we cleared that up.

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1154) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing. [REDACTED] lives in a two-bedroom unit in [REDACTED] with her [REDACTED] who she says has ADHD. [REDACTED] has been repeatedly harassed, intimidated and threatened by an abusive neighbour, and she has reported this to the housing office a number of times. However, the housing office has refused to do anything to support [REDACTED] and her [REDACTED]. They say she is on the priority transfer waitlist, but she has been on that transfer list for almost four years. [REDACTED] has sometimes had to resort to staying with a friend so that she and her [REDACTED] can sleep peacefully, only to return to her home damaged by her neighbour. The housing office has also threatened [REDACTED] with removing her from the transfer list if she continues to stay elsewhere, purely because she has to stay elsewhere for safety. Minister, I have written to you before, but nothing has changed. Will you intervene now and ensure [REDACTED] has safe and stable housing for herself and her [REDACTED]?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1155) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport in the other place. The past weekend my beloved Carlton Football Club participated in the AFLW Pride round against Fremantle, an event that demonstrates the spirit of sport and the importance of inclusivity. They looked just incredible in their Pride guernsey, designed by queer Vietnamese illustrator and graphic designer Zo Lam. A constituent of mine was also watching the game, and of course we got talking about Carlton and how inspiring they are and particularly our love of Pride round. She asked me a little bit about how she can be involved in playing footy in the local area, and it prompted me to think about: what steps has the Allan Labor government taken to increase female participation for women and increase inclusivity for people to participate in community sport like footy in my electorate? So that is my question to the minister.

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1156) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding lighting on Mickleham Road and Somerton Road in my electorate. I know Mr Erdogan would take a keen interest in this as well. These are vital state arterial roads that are frequented by thousands of constituents daily, including Mr Erdogan. It was raised recently with me by many constituents particularly along Mickleham Road between Alanbrae Terrace and Greendale Drive that there are no lights along this stretch of road. The road line markings are quite faded, and my constituents are asking for some LED lighting as well. I am hoping the minister can assist me with that. Many constituents have said it is extremely dark, and where there is no lighting it makes it extremely challenging to drive. So I ask the minister to please outline what work will be done to improve the safety of Mickleham and Somerton roads in terms of street lighting.

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1157) My question today is to the Minister for Planning, and it relates to the Ivanhoe water tank site at 421 Upper Heidelberg Road,

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Ivanhoe. My community is keen to know how many social and affordable homes will be available at this site. It is a prime location. It is public land, with beautiful mature trees on the site. This is an excellent opportunity to build a significant number of social homes and to provide many more at truly affordable rates alongside those big old red gums. My understanding is that there are approximately 275 homes in total planned for this site. Can you please inform me how many will be social homes and how many will be defined as affordable homes?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (1158) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. What measures are in place to protect the rights of residents in lifestyle villages, particularly regarding the sale of the property? I have been contacted by a constituent in Bendigo who was very frustrated to find that she is prohibited from placing a 'For sale' sign on her property in a lifestyle village, further complicating the process of selling her home. Additionally, my constituent has also advised that she is subjected to a 20 per cent exit fee, which is a significant financial burden, and in the unfortunate event of her passing, her estate must continue to pay rent on the property until it is sold, which is an additional strain during an already difficult time. What measures are in place to protect the rights of residents in lifestyle villages, particularly regarding marketing material associated with the sale of the property?

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1159) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Residents across Eltham in my electorate are frustrated, concerned and worried as they drive down Diamond Creek Road due to the terrible state of the road as it is today. Locals call it the windy mile and say potholes are in the worst state they have ever been in. The poor road conditions are causing traffic jams and damage to local cars and trucks, and they have to pay for it out of their own pockets. Residents in Eltham are fed up with this key road being neglected and taken for granted by the Labor Party and simply want the potholes in Diamond Creek Road fixed properly. My question is: when will the minister commit to a comprehensive repair of the potholes in Diamond Creek Road ensuring the fixes are durable and long lasting so this issue does not recur again, as it has in the past?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:57): (1160) My question is for the Treasurer, and I am delighted to ask it today as it is one of the few days that the Treasurer is actually in this country. I hope that he can answer this question before he takes off again. As more and more of my constituents receive their land tax bills for 2024, they are discovering the impact of this government's decision to increase land tax. I am sure that people on both sides of this chamber are getting calls, as I am. Several constituents have contacted my office in response to these outrageous land tax hikes and the lowering of the tax threshold. One business has seen their land tax increase by 350 per cent since last year, taking their bill from \$23,000 to over \$100,000 in this year. Despite the cash grab being organised under the pretext of a COVID debt repayment plan to alleviate the debt racked up by this state government in response to COVID, it is completely unfair. So my question to the Treasurer is: why should my constituents be paying exorbitant land tax fees until 2033 to pay back your government's COVID debt?

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:58): (1161) My question for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety concerns the state of the Geelong-Bacchus Marsh Road. A CFA volunteer and constituent contacted me. He had attended four accidents on the road in the last two weeks. We stopped outside a primary school, because I went there to check it out, where the road shoulder had completely disintegrated and substantial cracks had opened in the carriageway. It is not a back road but a 100-kilometre-per-hour route, a designated freight pathway, a road train road, as was apparent from

the number of trucks thundering past. Despite this, there were no turning lanes outside the school, and the original plan for a roundabout at the location was abandoned. Now, I have checked out the stats on this. Between 2012 and 2023, 236 people suffered accidents on the road, 132 were injured, 65 seriously, and there were nine fatalities. Minister, redesign the road.

### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (12:59): (1162) My question is for the Minister for Education. There are growing concerns about a significant increase in the use of casual relief teachers in Victorian public schools, which has resulted in more than \$365 million spent on casual relief teachers wages from May 2023 to May 2024, with some schools now spending an average of \$243,000 annually on replacement staff. Could the minister please provide an update on what steps the government is taking to address teacher shortages, reduce reliance on CRTs and ensure the long-term stability of our education system? Parents in my electorate have raised concerns about whether reliance on CRTs will affect their school and their children's education, particularly in schools across the north-west in places such as Manor Lakes, Wyndham and Sydenham, where shortages of staff are severe. The trend disrupts the stability of learning environments and places additional stress on schools already managing teacher burnout and turnover.

### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:01): (1163) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Will the minister reopen the Zurcas Lane bus stop that serviced the Harmony retirement village and the Shepparton East bowling club in Shepparton? Bus route 7 in Shepparton used to run along Zurcas Lane and make a stop right outside the Harmony retirement village, where there is a purpose-built bus shelter. The stop was frequently used by residents, who caught the bus as their main form of transport into town. The East Shepparton Bowls Club – which is also in Zurcas Lane – and its members also utilise this stop. The bus stop was closed without warning in May 2023, and now residents of the village are forced to walk up to a kilometre without protection from rain and sun to catch the bus at Shepparton Marketplace, and the bowlers who do not have access to a secure gate that allows village residents access to Marketplace are forced to walk even further. For many retirees that distance is just too far due to their age or their infirmity, and it is a struggle to carry a bag of bowls that far. I urge the minister to reopen the bus stop outside Harmony village in Zurcas Lane, Shepparton.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can I just clarify for the sake of Hansard that Mrs McArthur got cut short and she did not really ask the question. I think she meant to ask, 'Minister, will you redesign the road?', so we will put that down as her question.

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

### *Motions*

#### **Greyhound racing**

**Debate resumed.**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): I rise to speak on the motion put forward by the Animal Justice Party member Georgie Purcell, and do want to note that the Cranbourne area, a part of which I represent in the south-east, has had a lot of greyhound racing and a lot of greyhound racers. In fact there are a number of them that have made their income and that has been their livelihood for a long time. Many of them have absolutely loved their dogs and been very, very proud of their achievements. But of course in Cranbourne we found that the track was in dire need of redevelopment and the project costs came in at \$14 million, so I am not sure where some of the others are getting their figures from. But yes, it is true that there have been a number of animals that have unfortunately passed away – died – and that the racecourse was closed in 2022.



I must say on behalf of Greyhound Racing Victoria that they have very strict rules on how they look after their animals and what they look for. I want to recognise these rules that they have put in place, the five freedoms. That is: freedom from hunger and thirst for the animals, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury and disease, freedom to express normal behaviour and freedom from fear and distress. They have looked at that as one, the other being five domains – that is: optimal nutrition, an enriching environment that meets physical and mental needs, good health, normal expression of behaviour and a good mental state. Both of these models recognise that animals are sentient beings who can experience a wide range of emotions just like humans, and they consider emotion as equally as important as the physical state.

I want to also acknowledge that Greyhound Racing Victoria has gone to great lengths to make sure that the code of practice for keeping racing greyhounds in place has been strictly adhered to. They have a number of things that they monitor. They are very open to learning and to improving. It just bothers me tremendously that Animal Justice thinks that anything to do with animals needs to be shut down, any form of racing should be stopped. We have pony clubs that have racing in my region, and they should be allowed to have pony clubs for children.

Greyhound racing has been around for a long time. As long as there are good parameters in place, and Greyhound Racing Victoria is working so hard to make sure that there are, then I think that it is unfair to expect unreasonable changes and that these things need to continue to be negotiated with Greyhound Racing Victoria. I want to applaud them on their efforts to work constructively to make very good changes.

I want to give my colleague Mrs McArthur some time to be able to speak on this down the track, so I will be stopping at this point, but I do want to say that we are not happy with what the Animal Justice Party has put together and we will be standing up against this because of that.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:05): I rise in support of the greyhound industry – no surprise there. Let us be clear about this: this is a motion cloaked in care but shrouded in deception. This is not about the transparency and openness of the greyhound racing industry, this is a motion to, in the end, end the greyhound racing industry. It is quite clear on the Animal Justice Party website that they want to end all racing. Whether it is greyhound racing, flat racing, jumps racing or equestrian racing – even pony clubs have races – it will all end under the AJP. This is just the short edge of the wedge. This is the beginning of the end to racing in Victoria. It is not good enough. It is absolutely not good enough.

In my region of Western Victoria there are four racing tracks – at Geelong, Ballarat, Horsham and Warrnambool. Let us go to some statistics. The greyhound racing industry in Victoria generates more than \$643 million of value to the economy and supports, wait for it – you are all keen on jobs – 17,150 jobs and participants. The greyhound racing industry generates nearly \$428 million in expenditure in Victoria, 65 per cent in regional areas. We are crying out for investment in regional Victoria. This is going to kill some investment off. It supports over 3013 individuals via direct employment in the Victorian racing industry, while another 3687 people are employed in supporting industries. It engages over 10,450 people who participate in the racing industry either as a trainer, a breeder, a volunteer or an owner. It is a major supporter of regional Victoria, with more than half of the value added occurring in regional areas of the state.

In Horsham, for example, a fine town in my electorate, greyhound racing contributes \$3.5 million to the town and the Wimmera area. The Horsham Greyhound Racing Club directly employs 15 people, and it is the local track of around 30 trainers. In total the industry provides around 160 full-time equivalent jobs in Horsham and the surrounding area. Now, what is not to love about that?

Let us go to Geelong. The figure is around a hundred. No, sorry, a thousand – I cannot read my own writing – with 600 directly employed and 250 registered local trainers in the area. That is a large number of people working in an industry. The greyhound club itself sponsors other local sporting

clubs, and they use the club's facilities. They pride themselves on being supportive of the community. With a recent \$200,000 renovation, the club ensured local companies did the work; local businesses worked on this project. Greyhound racing contributes \$30.5 million to the Geelong local economy. I have been to that Geelong racing club, and it is spotlessly clean with immaculate facilities for the dogs, the trainers and all the staff. What a wonderful family outing it is.

I will tell you the other people who are absolutely so pleased to be there: it was all the unions. They sponsored all the races in the Geelong cup. Let me tell you, for example, the CFMEU, the Electrical Trades Union Victoria, the AMWU Victoria and the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union Victoria – those unions were the major sponsors of the Geelong cup race meeting. And what a wonderful job they did, those fine union members, those wonderful workers of the union movement that I know Acting President Berger supports continually in this place.

How can Labor be supporting this motion? You are supposed to be the party of the people. Like duck hunting, I do not think you will be able to end greyhound racing, Ms Purcell, just for the record, because the union movement managed to stifle the move to end duck hunting in this state and I think the same thing will happen with greyhound racing. I feel sorry for Minister Carbin. I know he supports the greyhound racing industry. He has been rolled. I do not know what you people in the upper house are doing. The poor minister is beside himself.

We would all not deny that accidents happen, and of course no one thinks of them as anything other than unfortunate, even tragic. But do you know what? Where is the motion on the attacks on the police horses that were so viciously attacked in various protests here? I was on the steps of Parliament House recently and I watched the Palestinian trans activist protesters being totally unkind to the police horses, and I know they were doing that in another protest. I am looking forward to the AJP motion that is condemning cruelty to the police horses in protests. That is what we need. We also need to look forward to the AJP motion that is condemning the cruelty that occurs in private ownership of puppies, the breeding of illegal puppies and pussycats in backyards and selling them on the internet and collecting them in a McDonald's car park – a totally terrible situation. I do not know what the RSPCA do these days. They are just activists. They do not actually care about animals much. But we need you to get on the bandwagon of all cruelty to animals, and particularly not these industries that actually work very hard to make sure their animals, whether they are greyhounds or racehorses or trotters or equestrian horses, are given the best of care.

I know you are a horse lover, Ms Purcell. I know you are, and you were a horserider of some note in the past. That is fantastic. Sorry, I am a bit old to get back on the horse these days, but we could have done that in an earlier life. But we are not supporting this motion, sorry to say. I know how passionate you are about it, Ms Purcell. But really, this is about killing off an industry, and we absolutely cannot have that happening, especially as it affects regional and rural Victoria. It is critical that we keep these industries going. And look, it is not only people's livelihoods, but it is their entertainment, their free time. When I was at the racetrack at Geelong, there were families there, there were things for the children to do. It was one happy family outing. We are worried about family violence, and it is terrible, and it is a great thing that they can all go out together and enjoy an outing in their local community that does a wonderful job for generating jobs and income and the economy, and it is important that we keep it going.

There are always going to be a few bad apples in any industry, and the regulations are such that these people get caught out, quite rightly so, and we are all for that. But thousands of Victorians are passionate about this sport, and I think it is offensive to presume that just because of this they want anything other than the best welfare for the greyhounds.

I have not been a Greyhound Adoption Program owner. I could be in the future. I have just lost my pet whippet. He was sort of a greyhound, you know. And I know Georgie has had a very unfortunate experience with her wonderful dog. What was his name?

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Frankie. Frankie is gone. We are all very sad about that. But look, GAP is fantastic, and I urge everybody to get on board, get a rehomed greyhound. That would be fantastic, and that would help out the show tremendously.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:15): That is a very hard act to follow. I thank members for their interest and comments in this debate today, particularly those who actually took it seriously and did not conflate it with something to do with goats and nappies and the assumption that every animal activist in the state simply must be an Animal Justice Party member. But what is abundantly clear from this debate is that the majority of members in this place support measures for greater transparency in the greyhound racing industry, and that is what is at the heart of this debate. It is in fact the very least we can do when this state and this government insist on racing them to their deaths.

Since the opposition have made it clear they are not supporting this motion today, I just want to pick up on some of their comments which are blatantly untrue and go to the point of why this motion is necessary. Mrs Hermans referenced the code of practice, which is actually voluntary – they do not have to follow that code of practice. If she was here for my speech, she would have heard me speak about the fact that greyhounds are not even included in our animal welfare laws – they are exempt. They are exempt because what is done to them would be illegal if they were included in those laws. Mr Mulholland spoke about the Evan Mulholland cup, which I actually was not aware of, and I only hope for his sake that it does not kill a greyhound. Although we know from the current figures, and hopefully the more transparent figures if this motion passes today, the chances of that are happening in his name are absurdly high.

It is also concerning to hear other members speak about Greyhound Racing Victoria's (GRV) so-called prosecuting. I hate to have to be the one to call this out, because I spoke about it at length, but prosecution is actually done by the Victorian Racing Tribunal as well, who are meant to be an independent body. That is the same tribunal I literally read quotes from giving trainers a pass for drugging in my own speech, so it is interesting to hear so many speak on them as being one and the same.

Ms Bath took it upon herself to do what she called some 'myth busting'. My office looked at her sources, and now I would like to do some myth busting of my own. Ms Bath said that my prohibited substances figures were false, which is interesting since they were actually taken from the GRV's own report. But she did raise a really good point in saying that. My number of 103 positive swab results is correct, but Ms Bath quoted 64, which is actually the number the GRV bothered to prosecute. So Ms Bath is really highlighting that GRV's reporting is not clear and transparent if she so easily misunderstood this. I thank her for that clarification, and it literally proves why these changes are so necessary. I personally would love to know what happened to the other 39 positive swabs for that year, and hopefully with these changes I am proposing we soon will.

The actual motion and what it does seem to be lost on many opposition members. It is not ending the industry, although, Mrs McArthur, I have made it abundantly clear that that is what I would do if I had the decision. But that is not going to happen today. That is not what this motion is proposing. In fact if opposition members want the greyhound racing industry to thrive in this state, they need to support measures that will maintain their social licence, which is rapidly deteriorating every single day. This motion is simply about transparency and simply about reporting, and these numbers already exist; I have said that. It is just that volunteers are doing the work that industry should be doing. As I said before, if members love and support this industry, then they should not fear the GRV giving us more data. In fact I would have thought that members would welcome this so that they could use the correct statistics in their speeches.

The motion seeks above all else to reveal the true experience of greyhounds in the state. So once again I thank members for their contributions, particularly Ms Copsey and Ms Payne, and Mr Galea for his lovely acknowledgement of Frankie Gamble, our beautiful office greyhound, who we so dearly miss and who this motion is dedicated to. I commend it to the house, and I am hopeful for its passing.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

*Noes (14):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

**Motion agreed to.**

***Bills***

**Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024**

*Council's amendments*

**The PRESIDENT (14:25):** I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012** and to make consequential amendments to certain other Acts and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

***Motions***

**Residential planning zones**

**David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:26):** I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the extraordinary population targets unilaterally announced for Victorian municipalities by the Allan Labor government;
  - (b) the 10 planned high-rise, high-density zones declared by Labor without consultation, including so-called 'catchment zones' over huge swathes of residential and often heritage-listed suburbs, proposed to have six-storey development approval;
  - (c) the removal of significant planning powers from municipal councils and local communities and the curtailment of third-party appeal rights; and
- (2) calls on the Allan Labor government to undertake proper consultation with affected councils and communities, to their satisfaction, on its announced plans for 10 high-rise, high-density zones, namely Hume, Boroondara, Stonnington, Monash, Glen Eira, Whittlesea, Frankston, Kingston, Bayside, Moonee Valley, Darebin, Maroondah and Whitehorse.

I am going to be succinct here, but what has happened in the recent period is the state government has embarked on a frolic of planning changes that will change the shape and nature of our city forever. They are doing this without engaging with communities properly. They are doing this without engaging with councils, and I am going to first of all deal with the issue of the housing and population targets. The government has nominated these. It is starting to consult after the nomination announcements, and we think whatever the view of people about increased population density and increased population numbers in local councils, there are several key principles. Local communities should have a say. They should be engaged. They should know what is happening, and the state government should engage closely with each and every one of these local communities across the city.

I live in Kew. In the City of Boroondara there are 70,000 dwellings currently. So from European settlement to now, 190 years, we have seen 70,000 dwellings built in the city of Boroondara. The state government's announced plan is in less than 30 years to add another 67,000 dwellings in the City of Boroondara. There has been no consultation about that. There is no plan for health services. There is no plan for education services. There is no plan for extra open space. You would imagine with twice the number of people you would want roughly twice the amount of open space. Open some parks. They are already at a premium in my area. This could be true of each and every one of these areas. I am using where I live as the example here. And the sewerage plan – I am going to tell you that the simple fact is if you double the number of dwellings, you are going to need to have additional capacity in the piping to deal with the consequences. There is no such plan. The state government has not got any of these plans in place. The transport decisions on all of this – where are these decisions? Where are the steps that say, 'Well, we're going to need new schools'? My kids went to Kew Primary. That school is already very crowded. It is already on a relatively small footprint. Are they going to double the number of kids in that school? Is that the plan? We do not know. No-one knows. They have not talked to anyone. That is the problem with this government – there is an arrogance and a decision-making process where they simply roll over communities. They punch through, they do not listen, and consequently the outcomes are far from optimal – they are suboptimal. I say that is the wrong approach. Even if you thought that municipalities could bear very significant increases, you would still want to talk about how you are going to service those new dwellings and service the new population.

The second part of the motion deals with the 10 planned high-rise, high-density zones, these so-called activity centres. There are about 120 activity centres around metropolitan Melbourne. The state government have singled out 10 of them – again, no talk, no consultation – and they have announced that they are going to massively increase the size and density and outcomes in terms of population. I have three of them in the Southern Metropolitan Region – three of the 10. They are in Epping, two in the City of Moonee Valley and Ringwood – they call it Ringwood, but it is not really Ringwood; it is Maroondah and a huge sweep down into the City of Whitehorse. Acting President Berger, if you were a person who represented North-Eastern, which is a very important electorate, you would look at so-called Ringwood and you would think about that and you would look and you would see that the actual length of this declared activity centre is huge. It is comprised of two parts. It is comprised of a less controversial – generally supported by the council and generally supported by the community – inner hub near the station in Ringwood, near Eastland, and everyone thinks that you can do more density and change sensibly in that area. But the state government shocked everyone by announcing a catchment zone around this – 800 metres right around it is a huge spread of area – with thousands of houses and thousands of properties and with, as of right, six storeys. Some of these areas are heritage listed, some of them have got significant vegetation and some of them are just normal, everyday, family suburban areas. Is it the decision of people in Whitehorse and Maroondah that they want, as of right, six-storey developments next door to them? Is that what they want? I do not represent that area, but my point is that people have not even been consulted about this. They have not been consulted. These have been announced without discussion.

In my area I come back to the Boroondara one in central Camberwell. It goes way up into Canterbury and down south across into Hawthorn and Hawthorn East. It is a massive area with tens of thousands of houses. About half of it is heritage listed; somewhere between 4000 and 5000 properties are heritage listed. Is it what we want to do? Do we want to tear down those properties and build six-storey, dense outcomes? I am not sure it is. In my area there was a large public meeting the other day, which John Pesutto and I were very active in. Jess Wilson was there, Georgie Crozier was there, James Newbury was there as our Shadow Minister for Planning, and 350 members of the community were there. There was not a single person in that audience who thought it was a good idea to tear down large, established heritage-listed homes to build, as of right, six-storey concrete boxes on these properties without consulting the local community. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about the Minister for Planning using her extraordinary powers to do this, with the sweep of a pen, to change the planning

arrangements in these areas. Is this what we want? It is not, I might add, what I want in my area, and I do not think I am alone.

We did talk to a lot of people. I do have a survey and a petition running on this matter. I have had a lot of people email my office. I have had people call. People are saying, 'Actually we love our area. We've moved into our area because that's where we want to live. We like the ambience of the area.' If we can find a sensible way to have more density – the council on the central nub near Camberwell there had in March this year agreed to a set of proposals with the state government. So I could be talking about any one of the 10 areas here, but I am picking one to talk through at some length. And my question then is: is that what people want? In some areas it might be what they want, in which case the government should work with the council and work with the community and actually put that in place. But I think people have a right to have some say in the future of their council area, the future of their suburb, the future of their street. Somebody at the public meeting said to me, 'Well, what about climate change?' And I said, 'Well, indeed, what about climate change?' There is no thought in this. There is no genuine thinking about what it might mean for the city.

But whether you are a huge climate change supporter or believer or whatever you want to call it or not, let me just tell you one thing clear: if you tear down the canopy trees in the street, if you tear down the canopy trees on large, old, established properties and if you tear down a house and you put 40 units made of concrete and brick on there without any canopy, it is going to get hot. This itself will be a heat island. Climate change and global warming will actually make that worse. We need to be planning for that. We need to be thinking about that and protecting canopy, not tearing down canopy. The proposal is about tearing down canopy. People have moved into an area and purchased a property, some of them heritage listed. I have used the example before. A number of people have asked me, 'What sort of street are you talking about?' I tell them to have a think about a street a friend of mine spoke to me the other day about, which is Kintore Street in Camberwell. It is a fabulous, wide, beautiful street with canopy and wonderful old Victorian homes on large-ish properties. Do we want to tear down that Victoriana, that history – our history, something that everyone gets benefit from? You go down that street, you visit somebody at one of those houses, and the public good of actually seeing these beautiful old homes and old buildings that are part of our history in itself should not be discounted. But do we seriously want to see every one of those homes torn away? Well, the government's proposal is in the catchment area, this huge catchment area of Canterbury, East Camberwell in the case of Boroondara, into Hawthorn and Hawthorn East and down further south – all of that sweep, six storeys as of right.

One of the things that the government is doing parallel to this is the residential code changes. These will set up a tick-a-box, a matrix. If you meet the criteria – you tick the boxes – the council will still be giving the permit, but the council will have no choice about the permit because they will be required to give the permit if the conditions listed in the tick-a-box system are met, irrespective of what the context is in the street and irrespective of local council plans beyond that. Irrespective of what arrangements are in place beyond that, if the simple tick-a-box things are met, the council must give the permit. This effectively removes power from councils – council officers and elected councillors – and thereby removes power from the community and puts power in the hands of the minister. And the minister is the one who is said to be declaring all these things. She has not yet acted on it, but she has announced what she intends to do. So I say we are at a point where we need to protect our city and we need to have a proper plan to deal with population growth. That means using some areas on the edge of the city and it means using our regional cities and working with them. It means having proper plans within municipalities – not imposed plans, but plans that are actually talked through and plans that have actually have a proper basis to them.

One of the things that Professor Michael Buxton, previously from RMIT, said to me the other day as he had been in to see the VPA – the Victorian Planning Authority – was that they have modelled the loss of 50 per cent of the heritage-listed properties in each of these 10 areas. That is what they are modelling. Is that where they are finally going to end up? I do not know. Nobody knows, because the government does not discuss that with people. You cannot get anywhere.

The City of Boroondara late Friday was presented with correspondence from the VPA demanding a response on matters by Wednesday close of business. Again, the councils are all in caretaker mode. This is not a world secret. They are in caretaker mode now, so you have got councillors who are not in a position to actually largely respond on this and you have got officers who need direction from councillors. There is no prospect in three days of the council and the council officers convening opportunities for the community to have a say. There is no prospect of that in three business days, so it becomes the planning minister and the Victorian Planning Authority and the department imposing what it wants on local communities, and I say there is a democratic deficit in that. There is a fundamentally undemocratic aspect to this, and I think that that is a problem.

What I also say here in number two is ‘we call on the Allan Labor government to undertake proper consultation with councils and community to their satisfaction’. We nominate the 13 councils that are affected by these 10 high-rise, high-density development zones, and I think that is a very modest minimum requirement. I know Mr Mulholland has already had one large public meeting in North Essendon. I know that concerns are developing in that Niddrie pocket in the City of Moonee Valley and in the North Essendon one, so there are two of these zones in the City of Moonee Valley. I know there is significant concern. I have spoken to the mayor in the City of Maroondah and a number of these other cities are very, very concerned – Stonnington is very concerned, Glen Eira is concerned.

Another area within my electorate of Southern Metro is the area around Chadstone. When you say to people Chadstone they think, ‘Oh, in around that big shopping centre.’ That is what they think when you talk about it. I can see some sense in increased density in certain spots around the shopping centre. But that is not what they have declared. They have declared a huge swathe of East Malvern, across into Oakleigh, through into Hughesdale and Murrumbeena, this massive swathe through three municipalities – Glen Eira, Monash and Stonnington. It sounds and feels very different when you think of a swathe that sweeps through three municipalities than when you think of a pinpoint spot. What they are proposing, again, in these catchment zones is as-of-right development of up to six storeys in height.

I could talk at length about alternative ways that we can get additional capacity through. One of the CEOs said to me, ‘We regularly issue 20 or 30 per cent more planning permits than are actually actioned.’ So there are a lot of planning permits in place. A lot of the problem with the development of property here is the state government taxes. According to the Property Council Australia and the Urban Development Institute of Australia, more than 40 per cent of the cost of a new property is state government taxes. I am actually very simple on this matter. If you want to make things less available, one of the things you do is you put a massive set of taxes on them. It makes the thing more expensive and there is less of it delivered, and that is what we are seeing in this state. We are seeing massive planning pressures on one hand, permits being issued and not being actioned and the state government not bringing forward a lot of its own land. Where is its own land in the process of developing new properties? Where is that new land coming through?

There are a number of points that I want to make in final conclusion here. This is a modest motion. It calls out the state government’s declaration of the 10 zones. It calls out the declaration of these massive catchment areas and the failure to consult on that at all – not at all. The councils were shocked. They looked at this and they went, ‘Oh, my God. Goodness. This huge area. And heritage listed. And where is the park land?’ No, this is failed planning – (*Time expired*)

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:46): I want to begin my contribution by perhaps correcting the record, really, on some of the wording in the motion here. The motion refers to population targets. That is inaccurate because the Victorian government does not have population targets, but it certainly has housing targets, and more housing equals cheaper housing. So I think it is inaccurate and somewhat misleading to imply in the motion that we actually have population targets when, after all, our strong economy is doing that job anyway.

The other correction I would like to point out is this notion of high rise, high density. Really, I think that is fearmongering. If you clarify the definition of various densities, *Plan Melbourne* describes low density as 8 to 20 dwellings per hectare, medium density as 21 to 80 dwellings per hectare and high density as 80-plus dwellings per hectare. High density is more commonly associated with significantly high-rise buildings; medium density is more like townhouses; and low density, detached housing. I do want to just correct that and make sure that there is no assumption that the actual basis of the motion is underpinned by any form of accuracy.

On Tuesday 9 January 2024 the Department of Transport and Planning published the *Victoria in Future 2023* estimations, covering 2023 to 2051. Unsurprisingly, this data shows Victoria remaining the fastest growing state in the country, with our population expected to reach 10.3 million people by 2051. Again I say: more homes equals cheaper homes. There is no doubt we are working on that challenge. Victoria continues to build thousands more homes than any other state. ABS data released this week shows Victoria built 60,606 homes over the year, a 7.5 per cent increase year on year, while New South Wales built 46,573 homes, a 3.9 per cent increase. Earlier this month the ABS also confirmed that Victoria continues to lead the country for home approvals. You may have seen this in the media – 52,419 approvals in the last 12 months, approving around 10,000 more homes than New South Wales and 18,000 more homes than Queensland.

The Allan Labor government is committed to taking a multifaceted approach to the housing challenge we currently face. The housing statement has already introduced draft housing targets – I say housing targets, not population targets – and what is the problem with that? We have supported thousands of homes through new streamlined approval pathways. We have gotten on with 10 activity centres underway, built thousands of social homes and introduced stronger protections for renters, and more. Since the release of the housing statement the Minister for Planning has also used her powers to intervene or fast-track homes to approve 10,700 homes in the past 12 months, a more than 100 per cent increase on previous years.

However, those opposite continue to object and complain and oppose measures on how to home our growing population. They seem to be happy to expect economic growth as an outcome of population growth, but they resist change. John Pesutto and the Liberals are trying to block more homes being built in their backyards. This is really a form of privileged nimbyism. They do not acknowledge the huge growth across Melbourne over the last 30 years and still have no serious plan to ease housing affordability in our state, nor do they acknowledge that growth has spread unequally, with consequences for many communities.

In relation to that inequality of growth, for example, in the last 30 years we have seen the number of houses grow 404 per cent in the City of Wyndham and 223 per cent in the City of Casey but only 24 per cent in Boroondara. This rapid growth has seen huge disparities in areas of growth and, as a consequence, huge disparities in services available to communities. We cannot fix that overnight, but we can put the right rules in place to make sure growth is guided to the right places in established suburbs close to jobs, close to transport and close to services. Medium-density areas serviced well with transport services, community centres and green spaces often thrive, and it is smart to focus on increasing housing density near existing infrastructure, including public transport, to increase accessibility to essential services and build more homes where people actually want to live.

We do not have to choose between open spaces and heritage to build more homes, and if you do not believe me, I would refer you to the Committee for Melbourne. They have done a piece of work on why Melbourne needs more medium-density housing. The committee's *Benchmarking Melbourne 2023* report goes on to say that urban expansion without a corresponding ability to keep up with appropriate supporting infrastructure investment has the potential to exacerbate social and economic inequalities. *Benchmarking Melbourne* highlights a 'tale of two cities', with residents living in the outer suburbs facing higher private transport costs and unequal access to amenities, education, health services, work and job opportunities as well as social experiences. This is exactly why we have



undertaken the largest consultation in Victoria's history in our Plan Victoria process, to see how we can accommodate more homes while also ensuring we keep what locals love about their communities.

The Allan Labor government is future focused for Victorians and has a positive plan for Victorians to live well. We are planning proactively to make the most of our resources and provide Victorians with livable communities with schools, services and infrastructure to grow, and I would appeal to those opposite to start moving past the nostalgia of the 1950s and start working towards Victoria's future in the 2050s. We need to look beyond the nimbyism in well-resourced suburbs and consider the benefits of new residents in well-equipped suburbs. Not only are there financial benefits in the existing infrastructure – water, power and road infrastructure, as well as health and education services; there are savings there – but also it is a joy to have an influx of new community members into a suburb that perhaps may have had no population change for a long period of time. This is the opportunity that we are providing through this process.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): Being a NIMBY is easy. Most of the parties in this place have done it at some point. For many local governments it is core business. A proposal to build more housing is put forward, and a local group does not want three townhouses on their street, so they organise the locals and lobby the local government to block it. It is the easiest thing in the world, and I am sure it feels good sticking up for the little guy against the forces of big development, but it is a sugar hit. This tendency of restricting development has been a driving force in the housing and homelessness crises occurring around not just Australia, but also in Canada, the United Kingdom and parts of the United States, particularly in cities like San Francisco, a city which resembles the successful implementation of many of the Greens' policies. Canada is also a good example, with the 'not in my backyard' crowd dominating policy for many years, or as many NIMBYs would prefer it, the 'I support more housing, just not here' crowd. This has led to Toronto having the worst housing bubble in the world and Vancouver being one of the most unaffordable housing markets on the planet. Rather than putting forward this motion, the Liberal Party should be looking at the Canadian Conservatives, who are polling at nearly 50 per cent support amongst 18- to 35-year-olds mostly on the back of a housing policy that involves radically stripping back planning rules and getting government out of the way.

In the Libertarian Party we take a slightly different approach, focusing heavily on property rights. Too many people in this state and in the country think somehow that it is just and right to have a say over what someone else does with their own property. If you want to paint your house red, the neighbours should not have any right to block it, and you do not have a right to any particular aesthetic. Neighbourhood character rules are the worst kind of busybody central planning socialist nonsense that exists. This leads to rules where somehow the house and land that you buy has restrictions on what colour the roof is, what colour the bricks are and what your fence can look like, and it is all absurd. Followed closely in this absurdity are our ever-expanding heritage rules. These are the crazy rules where some enthusiast of architecture can lobby the local government to list your house in the next heritage review, and then you have to pay tens of thousands of dollars to hire a heritage consultant just so your right to alter your own home – your property – is not hindered simply to pander to the aesthetic preferences of other people.

The government plan is mostly to enhance property rights. Local government should never have had the power to micromanage planning with neighbourhood character requirements and this ever-creeping heritage obsession. Aspiring home owners are increasingly recognising this impact, forcing up the cost of rent and pushing development further and further away from the city. It has taken far too long and caused far too much suffering, but the government are finally realising that the only solution to the housing crisis is to build more homes.

However, I do have some problems with what the government is proposing. Firstly, they should not be restricting these reforms to such a limited number of areas. Radical reform of planning rules across the whole state would jump-start the housing sector. Secondly, taxes are way too high and make up far too much of the cost of a home, in addition to stamp duty just being a crazy tax that distorts the

market. Lastly, it is not clear to me yet whether certain restrictions on objection rights will apply to people whose property rights – their real property rights – are directly impacted, for example, overshadowing solar panels. These are reasonable property rights issues. Whether it is by coincidence or design, this significant reform to local government powers overlaps with the local government elections, so councils are currently in the caretaker period for the elections, and we will soon have a whole bunch of new councillors that will be finding their feet. I also suspect that this is as much directed at value capture for the government revenue as it is about good policy, otherwise it would not be so restricted to only these 10 zones. An example of effective housing policy is in Houston, Texas. Houston did something simple: they never imposed the kind of zoning restrictions that exist in many cities around the world and in comparable cities in the United States. They have done something that seems mystifying to the busybody central planners around the world: they have maintained housing affordability with a diversity of housing options.

So I will not be supporting this motion. I would rather the government go much further and enhance property rights, radically remove planning and zoning restrictions, reduce taxes, streamline approvals and do anything else they can to remove barriers to building homes. There is a lot of talk about various policies to improve housing affordability, but the only solution is to build.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:01): I rise to speak on motion 619. We were once the Garden State. We cherished our gardens. We cherished the beautification of our suburbs and the correct balance between growth and the key ingredients of a stable, robust society. The slogan was born of a substantial reality that practically every home had a garden – practically every home had a back garden. It was in a very real sense a social technology, because I believe that back gardens, mature tree canopy, nature strips and readily available recreation space are part of a social technology that supports stable families and healthy young lives, reduces domestic violence and encourages outdoor activity and a sense of belonging. These things are not the products of a successful society but the essential ingredients to it. That is why Melbourne has been able to grow over 150 years and absorb all kinds of changes and cultures, ups and downs, because genuine homes with their own space and grassland were the great leveller between all – rich, middle-class and working class.

But we are no longer the Garden State. Indeed for half a generation now we have been actively destroying the legacy we inherited. We now consider tower blocks homes. It seems to me an acute form of insanity that we are consciously and deliberately reordering our society from one in which every family as a birthright had land and a space of their own to a social technology that says we put families in towers in two- and three-room apartments with a small balcony and we do so without any apparent recognition that this is going to create inequality and bad social outcomes in our society. We are deliberately building up layer upon layer of vulnerability in a growing city.

We made similar mistakes in the 1960s when the social vandals came for the architecture of Melbourne's CBD and tore down our most beautiful buildings and when we built tower blocks for commission homes across the city. By the 1980s and 90s we acknowledged that tower block living produces bad social outcomes and actively sought to undo it. We rethought urban design. We recognised the dignity of home ownership and standalone homes, and we largely stopped building towers in suburbs and developed alternatives. Yet here we are again, making the exact same mistake only on an even larger scale.

It is a mistake born of two fallacies. One is that Melbourne will have a population of 9 million to 10 million people in 30 years. I guarantee you right now Melbourne will never reach that size – never. Cities do not grow like that without entering into a Faustian pact to destroy the quality of life of its citizens to do so. It is only done when you treat people as economic units to be bundled up and allocated space in predetermined sizes to predetermined places. It is only achieved when you remove choice, when you remove local rights and when you plan from the top down and tell people to lower their expectations to the lowest common denominator. It is not a sustainable size, and it is not a thing we should do in a democracy where we get to choose our own future – to make planning and urban design decisions that try to drive that total into what was the world's most liveable city. The government's

plan is not to address a need, it is to make that need inevitable. And I am here to categorically say it is not inevitable that we are a city of 9 million or 10 million, and nor should we have a government force it upon us.

The second fallacy is that it represents good planning, and we are told this lie over and over again that we must cluster people in density near trains with pocket parks and ideally their workplace in the same building, like so many battery hens. Of course it is not. It is a disaster of urban planning. We are being force-fed the lie that it is better to build high-rise urban ghettos than build appropriate-sized new homes in new suburbs or build up towns in the regions.

And here I will throw the 'We will be London' line back at the ghetto-builders. England is roughly the size of Victoria. Over the last 100 years London has shrunk considerably. The size and the quality of life were understood to be incompatible with each other. Practically everything the UK has done in urban planning in the past 30 years has been to address this. They did not go, 'Oh, in 2050 we'll be the size of New Delhi, so we'd better make life worse for everyone.' Cities like Birmingham, Bristol, Brighton, Chelmsford, Oxford, Cambridge and Milton Keynes have all become the default growth centres. The cost of social infrastructure has been shared between cities and, by UK standards, away from density wherever possible – which brings me to Melbourne in 2024 and the urban design and planning spiral this government is driving us down.

We already know what the Suburban Rail Loop will look like in Box Hill. We already know that the government will continue to expand intense-density buildings upwards and outwards in the Suburban Rail Loop's Box Hill, Burwood and Glen Waverley precincts. We also have SLO9, significant landscape overlay 9, the Whitehorse planning scheme that is the last hold-out to protect urban tree canopy in Whitehorse, which is being removed. On top of this, the state government has demanded that the City of Whitehorse grows by 79,000 dwellings on the exact same footprint – and I say dwellings, not homes; the two should not be conflated. In the frantic effort to produce housing numbers, the government has given up any efforts on the quality of that housing. The lie is perpetrated by using phrasing like 'providing choice', as if the new template provides for any choice at all. Not one single new dwelling under these plans will be a traditional home with a front and back yard or a driveway, or anything to scale with historical Melbourne standards of living. There is no choice. There is just what you are being given by an autocratic government that sees numbers and spreadsheets but not human beings. It measures success in press releases, not in quality of life. And this is the drip-feed of radical planning changes, salami-slicing the changes into bite-size pieces to minimise scrutiny and resistance, making it hard for communities to understand the true scale of the whole.

Population targets, residence targets, rezoning changes, removal of objection, removal of heritage – these are things that should be announced as a coherent whole, as an urban planning package, done in full consultation with the communities, backed up with transparent and publicly available analysis and data. But none of these things have happened – quite the opposite. And the consequence: a looming disaster in urban planning design, the creation of urban ghettos with all their associated social problems, overcrowded schools, loss of open space, congestion, lack of recreation and sports, a radical oversupply of one form of apartments and the continued scarcity of genuine homes for families and young people, and the destruction of the quality of life for existing communities and families. The government is deliberately creating urban ghettos in inner suburbs, creating a concrete noose around Melbourne, instead of the classic backyard, front yard and nature strip that our generation – my generation – inherited from our forebears. The formula is clear: a Docklands environment for every suburb.

The motion is the correct manifestation of this concern in this place. How did this come about? What research and consultation was conducted? Why is it being released in salami slices? First came the SRL and Big Build entities with their stunning undemocratic authority and autonomy. Then came the population targets. Then came the resident targets. Then came the suspension of SLO9. Then came the height limits. Then they increased the height limits. Then there was the introduction of ResCode changes and then the activity centres and even more height limits – without a single word to the

councils or communities, and without the slightest electoral mandate. I am going to have to cut a lot of this out.

The population targets and activity centres are a fraud being committed upon the people of Melbourne, a smokescreen to cover total financial incompetence with the hope that it can buy the government another day. It is a fraud that can only be perpetuated by minds that do not see the communities of Melbourne as human beings but mere economic units – mere digits in a spreadsheet whose futures are being manipulated by formulas on that spreadsheet. Historic streets do not matter. Local democracy does not matter. The rights to comment, consult or even object do not matter. Local councils and their local knowledge do not matter. Due process does not matter. Social outcomes do not matter. The people of Melbourne do not matter to this government. The future of Melbourne does not matter to this government. There is no vision, no grand design – just property speculation to raise tax to feed the Ponzi scheme of the Victorian State budget.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:11): Thank you, Acting President McArthur; it is good to see you back in the chair in all your colourful splendour. I rise to also make a contribution on this motion in Mr Davis's name in regard to – it seems to say population targets, and I do not think that is quite correct, Mr Davis. I do not know that our government has population targets. I think maybe next we will be having to set procreation targets to make population actually happen, because we do not have population targets. Like I said, it is weird. I do not know, whoever wrote this maybe was not paying attention at the time when they wrote it, but there are no population targets. There are in fact housing targets, though – those we have.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA**: We have housing targets; that is absolutely right. Again I note this motion talks about having population targets, which is wrong, and then talks about the 10 planned high-rise, high-density zones – I think you are referring to activity centres; I note your use of political language and flourish there to try and scare people – and then the removal of significant planning powers et cetera and then it calls on us to undertake proper consultation.

I not only had the opportunity of listening to some of the contributions, but I was also in my office doing a little bit of research, because some of the councils that you talk about are in my electorate and some of them overlap it a little bit. It is interesting because earlier, maybe two weeks ago now, the Maroondah City Council did in fact send me a copy of their submission into the planning process, which they have lodged with the planning authority. I just read, and re-read actually for the sake of it, their submission, because contrary to what you were saying – I will just read the conclusion that the council wrote. This is Maroondah council in regard to the activity centre planned:

Council would once again like to thank the VPA for the opportunity to work with it on changes to the Ringwood MAC Masterplan 2018. Subject to some finetuning, it supports the changes to the Masterplan.

That is just in regard to the Ringwood Metropolitan Activity Centre (MAC).

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA**: No, that is what they said – the Ringwood MAC master plan – and they appreciated the opportunity to work with the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) on it. What the council did then go on to say is that they would like some fine-tuning of particular areas. But of course one of the things about Ringwood, which I know about my electorate – which you would not know because you have never been there – is that it does have a lot of leafy green trees. No-one is proposing to remove tree canopies; that is just not what they are saying. What they are saying is that residents have told the council –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA**: On a point of order, Acting President, I cannot even speak because of the loud interjections from those opposite, and I would like to be able to continue my contribution in silence. I

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know you are being distracted by two of my colleagues over here, but the level of noise is ridiculous, and I cannot hear myself.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** Ms Terpstra has a fair point, gentlemen – a bit of decorum, please. And I apologise, Ms Terpstra, I was talking to your colleagues.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Thank you very much, Acting President. I appreciate it. I will just remind the house that I did listen in silence while those two were speaking. I was not here for yours, but for yours I listened in silence.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** That was very good of you, but maybe you could get on with your speech now.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Yes, thank you, Acting President. And I am just gesticulating; I am not aggressively pointing either.

I return to Maroondah City Council's submission, and like I said, they appreciated the opportunity to work with the VPA. And the things that the community were telling the council were that the community members in Maroondah, in and around Ringwood, note and appreciate that there is some limited open space at the Ringwood Lake, but also the green leafy tree canopy is something that is highly valued by local residents. And the good thing about that is that we are not going to remove tree canopy. So again, the scare that the Liberals put into communities is absolutely something to be condemned, because again, those opposite do not want to do anything. I mean Melbourne is growing. It is growing to be a very large city, and we need to accommodate people. We have a housing crisis and we have a housing affordability crisis, and the problem is you cannot actively do something about that if you do not introduce more capacity into our housing system. And building more homes and increasing density is part of that.

I take issue with Mr Welch's contribution, because again, it was a very white 1950s world view about having suburban blocks and the like. I know in my electorate and particularly where my office is in Doncaster, my office is on the ground floor of a five-, six-storey building, and above my office there are actually residential units. People want to live in high-density buildings. They do not want to drive. They want to be able to walk to a bus stop or a bus station or a train station. They want to be able to use public transport to get into the city. That is why it makes perfect sense to increase high-density building development around public transportation, and that is what the Allan Labor government is doing. All those things make perfect sense.

I heard those opposite complain about the fact that government is taking away planning powers – blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I looked at – this is very, very helpful and publicly available information – .id data, which provides demographic information for councils, and one of the things I was able to look at was building approvals by year, by financial year to date. And for the City of Boroondara – it is a comparison year on year – if you look at 'Houses' or 'Other', the total for the 2022–23 year was 817 approvals – 817. Now, that was down 239 approvals from the year before, and if I look, there is absolutely a downward trajectory in building approvals. So for the financial year to date, 2023–24, there is again another downward trajectory, with less than 118 building approvals. So again, there is a downward trend.

So we look to local government areas that have capacity to do more, and we are going to encourage them to do more. Particularly in the area of Boroondara what we see is lots of catchcries about neighbourhood character and heritage and all the rest of it, but that is really code for, 'We don't want affordable housing in our neighbourhood. We don't want affordable housing, so people who aren't like us and who aren't rich and wealthy can't live and enjoy these sorts of neighbourhoods.' It is really terrible. It is code for racism really, quite frankly, and that is why the government has had to step in and look across metropolitan Melbourne and ask, 'Where are the areas that have more capacity to put more housing in those areas and within those networks?'

I return to Maroondah City Council, which again is a council that is in my electorate, and I have got to commend Maroondah City Council. I work with them quite closely on a range of things, and they actually do a really good job, but nevertheless they are needing some help in terms of building approvals. I also look at the types of residential dwellings that are being approved, because you can look at how many bedrooms are being approved. And guess what, the types of dwellings that people want – and they are the types of dwellings that you will generally find in high-density types of developments – are one- and two-bedroom units. That is because not everybody belongs or fits in a nuclear family. It is not 1954, where there is mum and dad and two kids. It is just not like that anymore. And people who have come from overseas actually like to live in units. If you look at people who come from Hong Kong, they are actually used to living in high-density buildings like units. It is something that you see quite frequently.

I look at the number of bedrooms on approval, and if you look at some of these councils, particularly Boroondara, the number of three-bedroom dwellings in the Boroondara municipality is actually less than the Greater Melbourne average. Again you have got this inconsistency in the type of housing that is being offered and the quality of housing that is being offered. What they want in the leafy suburbs of Boroondara is not to share what they have got. You have got this situation where they are trying to hang on to their neighbourhood and say, 'This is ours. We don't want to share it with anybody else. We don't want cheap or affordable housing. We want to maintain this 1950s ideal of the suburban block and the like.' Well, that is unfair. We have got people who want to come and live and work in Melbourne, and we need to make room. Otherwise, if we listen to those opposite, we have a housing crisis and it will just get worse. It would just absolutely get worse. As I said, I have commented on Boroondara before. Boroondara only grew 24 per cent over the last 30 years, despite being well serviced by jobs, transport and services, while outer suburbs like Wyndham grew by 404 per cent over the last 30 years. It is pretty clear those municipalities need help. That is why we are going to introduce activity centres, as we have proposed.

We are consulting with people. Maroondah City Council, a council that I work with very closely, are thankful for our assistance. We will continue to move on with making sure we introduce more affordable housing into our market.

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:21): In September last year then Premier Andrews announced Labor's long-promised plan that he said would help solve the housing crisis. In the 12 months since, Labor's plan has only made the housing crisis worse. This plan had five key planks. It was supposed to create a better planning approvals process, make housing cheaper, protect renters, create more social housing and create a long-term housing plan – they promised. But 12 months on this plan is failing.

House prices are still 15 per cent higher than they were in 2020, rents have risen over 10 per cent in the last year alone and more and more people report being in housing distress. Just today we heard reports that between June and December the number of public houses fell by 446, from 64,993 to 64,547, while overall social housing units dropped from 88,189 to 88,135. The public housing waiting list remains persistently high at over 100,000. Homelessness is rising, with over 30,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in Victoria, and Victoria is consistently the state where the greatest number of people seek to access support services for homelessness.

Victoria remains the lowest spending state on the maintenance of public housing per capita. The government have deliberately been running our public housing stock into the ground so they have an excuse to demolish and privatise it all. That is Thatcherism 101. In the midst of this worsening housing crisis this Labor government continues unabated with its plans to demolish all the public housing towers in the state and privatise these estates by handing over two-thirds of the land to private developers, with no promise to build any public housing at the majority of the estates. It is not a housing plan, it is a developers' picnic.

This motion highlights the continued failure of this Labor government to talk with communities and take communities along. Big reform at the scale which is needed to solve the housing crisis needs communities to be informed, consulted and engaged genuinely and meaningfully. You just have to look at what is happening at the public housing tower sites to know that Labor is treating the community with absolute contempt right now. They are often the last ones to find out about a decision that will alter the course of their lives, while developers are often the ones cooking up the plans, with the government around the table, that maximise the benefits to them.

The Greens welcome an ambitious housing program. We welcome bigger housing targets and reject any scapegoating that migration is causing the housing crisis. This type of lazy excuse-making is wrong and it is racist. The Greens believe that we can increase the number of homes we build and that they can be affordable and sustainable too. What is missing from Labor's housing plan is a plan for the 100,000 public homes we need over the next decade and the inclusionary zoning that could make this possible.

Supply alone cannot fix the housing crisis. It has to be affordable supply, and the best type of affordable supply is public housing. That responsibility sits squarely with the state government, but in Victoria Labor is running away as fast as it possibly can from that responsibility. It is retreating from public housing, handing over huge swathes of public land to developers and displacing thousands of people. It is failing to introduce inclusionary zoning, including in some of the activity centres cited in this motion, and inclusionary zoning would mandate and require a percentage of these new developments to be set aside for public community and affordable housing. That is how you solve the housing crisis. Labor continues to scapegoat local councils and communities for its own failings and wants to place all the blame and responsibility on councils for the housing crisis. Announcement after announcement, it is writ large. Even with the targets announced in June and the activity centres proposed, the government did not do any of the work to build community support.

We need more housing; we need more affordable housing. We support more housing around transport infrastructure and existing social infrastructure to end the endless sprawl. But there are legitimate concerns with Labor's plans and the process they are using to achieve these plans. While we might not agree with everything in this motion, this motion does call for much better consultation and regard for the ability of local communities to have a say in matters that impact their lives. I hope the government can at least listen to that important message and start talking to people, not leaving whole communities behind.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:26): Thank you for the opportunity to join with others in this place and make a contribution to the motion put forward by Mr Davis regarding high-density zones. I am going to take a moment just to reflect on Melbourne and the growth of Melbourne over the last 30 years, and I have got to tell you, it has grown unequally and it has grown unfairly. In the last 30 years we have seen the number of homes grow by 404 per cent in the City of Wyndham and 233 per cent in the City of Casey. When I look closer to town, to the City of Boroondara, there is a growth of 24 per cent. I have got to tell you, you cannot fix that overnight, but we can put rules in place to make sure that growth is guided in the right places, in established suburbs, in places close to jobs, close to transport and close to services, because busy areas with heaps of transport options like Camberwell should not be locked up, they should be opened up.

What we are observing is those opposite trying to block more homes being built in their backyards. We have introduced some of the most ambitious housing reforms in the country to ensure more Victorian families have the opportunity to build a home where they want to live. However, those opposite are, well, trying to block this every step of the way, and if they do not want housing built in established suburbs where services and infrastructure already exist – where? Where do they want them built? Because the truth is that people want to move to Melbourne and they want to have homes here. This is an important point: where is our new housing going to come from?

I would suggest that what we are seeing is a new form of elitism here from the opposition. They cry out for more workers, who are needed to drive business and keep the state running, but they cry even harder when they have to share their suburbs with them. It is akin to making the workers use the back entrance or stay in the service quarters or, to hark back to some other phrases that come to mind – but I am thinking about the great Rosa Parks. I have got to tell you, Mr Davis does not want to see everyday Victorians in Stonnington, Monash, Glen Eira, Kingston, Maroondah and Whitehorse. He wants them pushed out to the ever-expanding suburbs where, really, it is like, ‘I don’t want to look at you.’ There is a failure to understand that resources and facilities in established suburbs are already in place. Those opposite do not understand infrastructure – frankly, because they have never built any. They only try to privatise it when they get in and then privatise what we have delivered.

The high-density zones that this government have highlighted are where new housing is needed. There are existing road and public transport networks. We note last time those opposite were in power they had no plan for Victoria, no infrastructure in the pipeline. They try to pretend that they are better economic managers, but they cannot seem to grasp that the necessary infrastructure and services in outer Melbourne cost far more than in investing in existing suburbs where people need to live.

The suburbs that I represent know all about high-density living. We experience the community and culture that we create. Residents in my suburb are living where they are and contributing to their community. Public transport is already established. It is already utilised. They can shop locally and get appointments close to where they live. Their travel to work is really easily accessible. I just really cannot handle those opposite talking about high-density living in such a demonising way. The fact is, and I have said it more than once, I live in an apartment, and to make out like it is somehow lesser than and my community are less worthy is absolutely abominable. People can make a community in apartments, and that is exactly what is happening in our city. The high-density living in my region has some very strong working-class roots. We hear all about it, and I know that people are worthy of living in our more established suburbs.

When we announced the activity centre program and the introduction of local government housing targets in our landmark housing statement, we were getting on with delivering on those commitments, and from the moment that that announcement was made until this very day we continue, because the truth is that the status quo is not an option. We need to deliver more housing choices where Victorians are telling us they want to live. They want to live close to public transport, jobs and services and close to where they grew up.

As part of the housing statement, we announced we would introduce local government housing targets as part of the new plan for Victoria. In June there was the announcement about the draft housing targets for every local government area in the state as part of the new plan for Victoria. These are draft targets, it is important to note, and we have been consulting with councils to harness their local knowledge. We asked councils to report back on the draft targets and local changes that they have proposed. I really know that that is very, very interesting. There is an opportunity for our state and local governments to work together to respond to local opportunities and address barriers to getting more homes on the ground in the right locations. The targets focus on increasing density near existing infrastructure, including public transport, to increase accessibility to essential services and build more homes where people want to live. We do not have to choose between open spaces or heritage and building more homes. This is exactly why we undertook the largest consultation in Victoria’s history on our new plan for Victoria to see how we can accommodate more homes while also ensuring we keep what locals love about their communities.

I had the good fortune to attend a consultation in the city with the Minister for Planning and a range of representatives where I got to hear directly from community members. It certainly had some very strong contributions from community members about what was going on.

**David Davis:** Are you coming on Sunday to the rally at North Essendon?



**Sheena WATT:** I will say that I am sure that the local member there will be very interested to hear what happens. But I have got to tell you I am focused on the delivery of the housing statement, released in September last year. We said we would introduce clear planning controls to deliver an additional 60,000 homes over 30 years around 10 activity centres across Melbourne. These centres were chosen for a range of reasons, including their potential to host more homes close to trains, trams, shopping centres, jobs and services – the things Victorians want linked to housing. Work on these reforms is incredibly important, and it is already underway. I was delighted to hear that Camberwell Junction was one of the pilot activity centres announced more than a year ago, and we have been working closely with every activity centre council since March.

Since September 2023 – so just over a year ago now – there have certainly been frequent meetings with councils involved in activity centre programs, including workshops for council planning directors and monthly meetings since February 2024, so for more than six months now. There have been, as I said, community consultations. The first started in March and phase 2, where communities would comment on the draft plans for the activity centres, was opened in August and September. In the catchment areas surrounding the activity centres – everything that is within a 10-minute walk of shops and transport – there are some new rules in place to encourage more townhouses and apartments ranging from three to six storeys in height. With that being clear, there will be no changes to third-party appeals for this catchment.

As more people call activity centres home, we want to make sure that the local shops, services and infrastructure have the funding they need to grow. We are working on a simplified infrastructure funding mechanism to fund the things these suburbs need into the future. This policy is based on our housing statement and it covers some really key points: good decisions made faster, cheaper housing close to where you work, protecting renters rights, more social housing and a long-term housing plan. And that is the difference between us and those opposite. We have a clear, defined plan for Victoria, a plan that is informed by the communities that will be impacted. So I am delighted to hear that we have these activity plans progressing so well, informed by community every step of the way.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:36): I rise to speak to motion 619 in Mr Davis's name in relation to the activity centres that the government is proposing to put right across the city of Melbourne. I have just been listening to a number of government speakers, and if any members of the public were listening to the debate now they would be horrified, because what we got from Ms Terpstra was talk about Shanghai towers. She is backing Shanghai-like towers, as is Ms Watt, who says they are backing high-density towers. But this was not taken to the people. This plan was not taken to the Victorian community in 2022. No voter knew of the government's plan to put towers of 20 storeys and above in council areas right across metropolitan Melbourne.

Mr Davis's motion goes to looking at population targets that have been announced by the government without any consultation concerning the 10 planned high-rise, high-density zones declared by Labor. Now, this is only the start of it, I might add, because they have said that there will be more zones. Again, this was declared by Labor without consultation, including so-called catchment zones over huge swathes of residential and often heritage-listed suburbs. They are proposed, as Mr Davis's motion says, to have six-storey development approval. In the area that Mr Davis and I represent there are very significant concerns from members of the community, and local councils I might add, around the heritage protection that will go. These areas have got heritage protection overlays with very significant buildings that have been part of the city's history, and this government wants to tear it all up. They want to put huge towers right across areas in Melbourne.

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER:** I am getting the interjections from agitated backbenchers who know that they are on the out. They know this is a disastrous decision, and they know they will not be long in this Parliament. They will be out, because this issue is so concerning that there are thousands of Victorians that are actually coming to the community forums, and I want to talk about that.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** On the edge of your and my electorate, Mr Galea, I was down at a forum not long ago and this issue –

**Michael Galea:** Kingston council are very supportive. Kingston are very keen to have more development.

**Georgie CROZIER:** No, it was not. There were hundreds of people really concerned about your unilateral decision around the Suburban Rail Loop and the towers that will occur. We were at a forum the other day in our electorate again –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Acting President, could you please call Mr Galea to order? I cannot hear myself.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** Mr Galea, could you tone down your interjections, please.

**Georgie CROZIER:** As I said, Mr Galea might have concerns around what I am saying, but let me tell you, there are thousands of Victorians really concerned about the government's plans, which were never taken to the people. They were never taken to the people in an election. Mr Galea can interject all he likes, but I listened to question time, and there is a group in Essendon who are equally concerned around their community and what is going to happen. They have a forum on Sunday. Mr Davis, I think, is going; Mr Newbury, the opposition planning spokesperson; Mr Pesutto, the Leader of the Opposition; and others are attending because this is important. Those members of the community will tell you, like other members of the community, that there has been no consultation.

This motion calls on the government to have proper consultation with affected councils and the communities, and I am going to name them. The high-density zones are, namely, Hume, Boroondara, Stonnington, Monash, Glen Eira, Whittlesea, Frankston, Kingston, Bayside, Moonee Valley, Darebin, Maroondah and Whitehorse. These are huge areas of Melbourne. I have raised this issue in the Parliament previously and I have asked the minister to have proper consultation, because I have been speaking to one of my local councils, and this is the letter they have sent me:

Council has been actively engaging with the VPA, submitting officer comments during the discovery phase and more recently on the draft planning content ...

This is for an area that is affecting them, around Chadstone, so it goes into Stonnington, Glen Eira, Monash and a whole range of council areas.

We are also deeply concerned about the unwillingness of the VPA to forward background reports and technical reports to Council which we have been advised, informed the current set of draft plans. It has been difficult to provide informed comment on the draft plans without this information.

The government say they have been consulting the councils. Well, I am telling you the councils do not agree that they have been consulted with properly or appropriately. Consultation is currently scheduled to close on 29 September, which is during the caretaker period for the upcoming elections. That is an issue I have raised previously in the house regarding those closure dates and having them extended because of the caretaker period. But the minister conveniently just disregarded any of that.

This letter goes on to say:

The release of the draft plans, particularly the inclusion of the catchment areas has unfortunately caught most councils, including ours, off guard. The lack of information provided to Council combined with the lack of response to our comments, combined with the very short period from submitting comments to the release of the drafts on 22 August, gives us little confidence that there was any intention to genuinely consider stakeholder feedback.

And that is the point: this government did not provide public consultation. They had no intention of doing it. They have rammed this through. As they have said, there is just a backlog of strategic planning work for planning authorisation anyway that the minister is sitting on. It is around a whole range of things in Bentleigh East, in Elsternwick, in Glen Huntly, in McKinnon, in Caulfield South and in Gardenvale. There are just a range of issues that have not been addressed, yet this government has conned Victorians yet again. They conned Victorians on the Commonwealth Games when they ripped up the Commonwealth Games. It has cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I am saying that you conned Victorians, Mr Galea, and I am coming to the –

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, I appreciate Ms Crozier's skill in linking many things into one subject, but this is not a motion about the Commonwealth Games; this is a motion, as ill conceived as it is, about housing, and I ask Ms Crozier to come back to it.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** Thank you, Mr Galea. Ms Crozier, maybe just return to the motion.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I am very happy to, thank you, Acting President, because the point I was making is: as the government have conned Victorians on the Commonwealth Games, they have conned Victorians on the activity centres too. That was my point before Mr Galea jumped to his feet, very agitated about the fact that Victorians are being conned by Labor, by Jacinta Allan, who for years was overseeing the Commonwealth Games and now is overseeing the Shanghai towers that are going to pop up all over metropolitan Melbourne. That is what Ms Terpstra said – she was agreeing with the Shanghai towers.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** What did she say, Mr Davis? She called it the Shanghai model. I do not want to verbal her, but there was the reference to that, because I was talking about Shanghai towers across Melbourne. That is the point of this motion. I think Professor Buxton, an expert in this field, was very clear at a forum not long ago talking about the impacts and how these zones will further reach and encroach on many parts of metropolitan Melbourne. I say again the community are not conned by Labor on this issue. They know it is very desperate and a very bad planning decision, where communities have been shut out of any consultation, where councils have been shut out of proper consultation, and that is not a democratic way. This is liberal democracy we live in here, but you would not know it under Labor. It is 'My way or the highway', and we have seen it on numerous decision-making processes over the last 10 years in relation to what the government plans to do. This is not the proper way to do a planning decision. We have got an incompetent Minister for Planning, out of her depth, and I suggest that she come along on Sunday. She has refused to in question time, but she should come along and hear from residents in Essendon.

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, I am just a bit concerned about the remarks Ms Crozier made. I think she was actually verballing Ms Terpstra, and I ask that she withdraw those comments. I do not believe that they were actually said by Ms Terpstra, so I would ask that they be taken back.

**David Davis:** On the point of order, Acting President, Ms Terpstra clearly referred to Shanghai, and she clearly referred to it favourably as a model.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** We are happy to look at *Hansard* and check what Ms Terpstra said.

**Georgie CROZIER:** On the point of order, Acting President, I was interjecting when Ms Terpstra was on her feet talking about the Shanghai towers, which she referred to. That Shanghai model is what I was referring to. She was talking about high density, so it was in that context.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** I do not think there is a point of order.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:48): I will be brief in my summation here. This is a very straightforward motion. It picks up the state government's attempt to impose targets on municipalities, pushing more housing and more people into municipalities without doing the background work. It picks up the 10 planned high-rise, high-density zones. We have listed the municipalities and the associated massive catchment zones where six storeys as of right is intended by Labor. It picks up the removal of third-party appeal rights and the approach of the government to roll in these planning powers without discussion with councils and without discussion with communities.

One of the Labor contributors tried to say that there is consultation going on now. Well, that is after the zones have been announced. It is after the steps have been taken. It is after the areas have been designated and pulled out of the normal planning approach. Everyone now knows that those large swathes of land, the so-called catchment areas, are actually game for this government to force in new population, new housing, and to do it at the expense of local areas and to do it without a proper plan. There is no plan. There is no plan for open space, there is no plan for schools, there is no plan for sewerage, there is no plan for traffic, there is no plan for health services.

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I am referring here to what Ms Watt said, and she was very, very direct about the need for these high-rise areas and the fact that they were going to have to suck it up when it came to the additional open space. Where is the open space going to come from? It is not clear from what she said. Nobody knows where that open space is going to come from.

All this motion then does is call on the Allan Labor government to engage in proper consultation with affected councils and communities to their satisfaction, and it names those communities: Hume, Boroondara, Stonnington, Monash, Glen Eira, Whittlesea, Frankston, Kingston, Bayside, Moonee Valley, Darebin, Maroondah and Whitehorse, those 13 councils that are the subject of the 10 new high-rise, high-density regions. And here we go with the state government – they have announced another 10 zones are going to come. They have not announced where they are, but they are going to make another 10 zones, so there will be 20 of these zones, and that is just the start of their approach. As Mr Welch pointed out, there is also the massive density that is being imposed around the Suburban Rail Loop stations. So it is a state government that is not listening, a state government that is arrogant, a state government that is out of touch and a state government that needs to be brought back to the community to listen and engage.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (12):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

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

**Motion negatived.**

### **Mature minors decision-making**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (15:58): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the Department of Education's duty-of-care policy affirms the importance of harm minimisation when caring for children and adolescents;

## MOTIONS

- (2) affirms that children and adolescents have the right to access accurate records relating to their own mature minor declarations;
- (3) calls on the government to mandate the creation of official records for declarations of mature minor status in Victoria, including but not limited to:
  - (a) details of the child/adolescent being declared, their parents or legal guardian, the adult, employee or officer making the declaration, and all others involved in the process;
  - (b) all information relevant to the mature minor status decision, including the specific purpose the status was granted and the reason for determining sufficient maturity and intelligence to understand the decision, including, if possible:
    - (i) knowledge of and conversations with the child/adolescent;
    - (ii) medical and psychological history;
    - (iii) living arrangements and independence;
    - (iv) academic results and school reports;
    - (v) views of named members of the leadership team, teachers, school welfare staff, support services staff or external health professionals treating or working with the child/adolescent;
    - (vi) whether another professional has decided the child/adolescent is capable of making other decisions;
    - (vii) whether the child/adolescent will inform their parents/carers before making the decision;
    - (viii) whether it is in their best interest to make the decision with or without their parents/carers consent; and
- (4) requires these records be stored permanently, accessible upon request by any person who was declared a mature minor as a child or adolescent.

It is my absolute pleasure to be standing here today to move this motion 622 calling for the government to mandate the creation of official records for declarations of mature minor status in Victoria. Historically, mature minor status was granted by qualified doctors to teenagers whom they clinically assessed as having adult levels of maturity and intelligence and therefore being able to consent to contraceptives and the like without needing parental consent. Rightly or wrongly, it was regarded as a limited, balanced intervention that preserved a maturing young person's right to privacy and independence in specific situations, which also preserved the general integrity of parental guardianship rights. But in Victoria, mature minor status has moved well beyond the GP clinics and qualified medical professionals and into the purview of adults and leaders who just happen to be on school grounds. I have heard tell that it has spread even further to other contexts, like local council youth programs. And it is not just for things like the pill anymore. It is for social gender transition at school and referrals to third-party health providers, who can then facilitate medical gender affirmation, all without parental knowledge or consent, all under this legal fiction, in my opinion, of mature minor.

I have had it confirmed that in Victoria mature minor declarations are not required to be documented and held on file like other mental health or medical interventions. There are no formal processes for declaring a student to be a mature minor. There is no formal collection of data about students who have been declared mature minors for any reason, including gender transition or referrals to third-party providers.

My motion today is not actually about whether or not mature minor declarations should exist in law. They do, and I accept that. I am hoping that this is a very reasonable call just to make these mature minor declarations accountable and transparent. My motion today is based on my belief that children have a non-derogable human right to the protection of adults, primarily from their parents but also from every adult entrusted with their care. It is based on my belief as a parent, as a teacher and as an MP that child safeguarding is an honour and a duty. It is based on my belief that adults are responsible for what they do or do not permit children in their care to do, and it is based on my belief that to try and shirk that responsibility by putting the legal and moral risk back onto the shoulders of vulnerable children is wrong.

My motion today is a simple one, calling on this government to mandate proper record keeping for mature minor declarations so that, if they need them, children can access them later in life. We all know that institutions and individuals make mistakes, sometimes grave mistakes with grave consequences. It goes without saying that when you add in medical and psychological interventions the risk is obviously much higher. Good record keeping is the tool of justice. Children who are declared mature minors are going to need good records if they want to pursue negligence, redress or abuse claims against persons or institutions who unlawfully or negligently declared them to be mature minors, or even just for the integrity, continuity and consistency of care. My motion is about the rights of children and our duty of care as adults.

The Department of Education's own duty-of-care policy states that schools and staff must take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm. It even says that this duty is non-delegable, meaning that it can be shared but it cannot be assigned to another party – I would say a party like a child. Further, mature minor declarations are supposed to consider the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, which lists the right for a person not to be subjected to medical or scientific treatment without full, free and informed consent, and that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child's best interest and as needed by the child by reason of being a child.

Child: the word itself is meant to denote the fact that they are physically, intellectually and emotionally immature and inexperienced. Children as a class are therefore considered in life and in law as a vulnerable group. They are vulnerable to making mistakes, being misled and being exploited. It is why normally the general legal standard is that children cannot consent and that consent must be granted by their parents or guardians. It is why normally the decisions made on behalf of children by adults, no matter whether they are parents, guardians, teachers, babysitters, doctors or a random person in the street, are held to such a high standard of scrutiny. It is why the general assumption in normal situations is that children and young adolescents are incapable of understanding or bearing the responsibility for serious decisions that they might make, legally or morally.

We just had this debate recently where I heard those on the opposite side call for children aged 14 and under to be spared the dreadful weight of adult liability for their crimes. So why are children 14 years and under being forced to bear the dreadful weight of adult liability for their serious non-criminal decisions that in every other context would require an adult to consent to on their behalf? The truth is that we cannot fulfil these duties when we have no formal processes or records, no chain of custody for transferring legal consent from a teacher back to the child and then to a counsellor and to a doctor et cetera. Without mandated formal assessments and mandated formal records there is no way to ensure that decisions have been made in the best interests of the child according to the charter, and there is no way to ensure that schools have fulfilled this duty of care to take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm. There is no way to prove it one way or another. And without detailed records the child has no way of accessing justice if anything goes wrong after they were made responsible for drastic decisions about their childhood mental health and physical health.

Every Victorian should have the right to know how –

*Members interjecting.*

**Moira DEEMING:** Is there actual hissing going on at me, Acting President?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Not that I am aware of.

**Moira DEEMING:** I can hear it.

**A member** interjected.

**Moira DEEMING:** I asked if it was hissing; it sounded like hissing.

Every Victorian should have the right to know how and why responsibility for their welfare as a child was voluntarily surrendered by the adults in charge and placed back onto their own shoulders as little children, and often without the original custodians of consent – the actual parents – ever being told.

Without ironclad accountability mechanisms – like records – mature minor status appears to me to be a way for adults to blame children legally and morally for the impact of decisions that they should never have been allowed to make themselves.

This motion proposes what should be considered a straightforward and uncontroversial step. The government has admitted to me that they do not keep these records – they do not mandate them. I am just asking that the government mandate the creation of official records for the declaration of mature minor status and that these records be maintained and made accessible upon request by any person who has been declared a mature minor as a child or an adolescent. I commend it to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:07): I rise to speak on the motion put forward today by Mrs Deeming, and I will be speaking against the motion. I do so because I believe that this is a motion that goes beyond the mere matter of record keeping or even the approach to mature minors in public schools.

Currently there is a concerted effort – and I am not even necessarily saying by those in this chamber, but by some commentators, shock jocks and other political opportunists. For many of these people it is not about necessarily what is best for children; it is not about their wellbeing or safety. For some it is about their ideological views on gender issues and the rights of queer people in general. For many more it is not even necessarily about that but about the never-ending culture war, cynically exploiting issues such as this, whether it be for fame, attention, money or indeed fearmongering for the sake of fearmongering.

That is not to say that there are not cases of legitimate concern and some parents that may have some legitimate concerns. I do not doubt that those concerns are heartfelt and sincere, but I do remain very concerned by the fact that there seems to be a large number of people who seem more focused on spreading fear and misinformation about LGBTIQ+ people. And I am dismayed because I do believe that there is room for genuine discussion on what is best practice for children, on how we can support them and on how to keep them safe, but as long as this issue is exploited by those who would exploit it for those extreme purposes, we cannot get that cut through, we cannot achieve meaningful discussion and debate.

All students have a right to feel safe at school. This includes being free from discrimination based on race, on religious belief, on sex, on gender identity or on sexual orientation. This is a protection that is of course afforded to all Victorian people, and it is entirely appropriate that it be afforded to young Victorians at school as well. This Allan Labor government is committed to providing safe and inclusive learning environments for all Victorian students, including supporting those who are members of the LGBTIQ+ communities in our schools. Gender identity is a protected attribute in Victorian and Australian law, and it acknowledges that a person's gender identity is part of how someone understands who they are and how they interact with other people. The Department of Education have an obligation under anti-discrimination law to ensure that these students are protected on the basis of their gender identity, and they are required to take reasonable steps to do so. Consistent with the law, the department's LGBTIQ+ student support policy requires schools to take reasonable steps to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex, gender and sexuality. This includes providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTIQ+ students.

Victorian schools are also required to implement the child safe standards, which are compulsory minimum standards for all Victorian schools to ensure that they are well prepared to keep children and young people safe and protect them from harm and abuse. Child safe standard 5 requires all schools to uphold diversity and equity in policy and practice, paying particular attention to the needs of a range of student cohorts, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those with

a disability, those that are not able to live at home, those international students and of course queer and Indigenous students as well.

I think it is really important to reflect on the fact that each person does have a very different journey in life and through school. As one metric, when you look at the suicide rate amongst sexually diverse young people and if you look at the suicide rate amongst gender-diverse people even more so, these numbers are shocking – they are harrowing. There is so much that is being done and there is so much more still to be done. On this side of the house we are committed to doing what we can to support those young people in whatever ways we may – indeed in some cases even when they are not receiving that support at home. These suicide statistics are frankly shocking, and it would be remiss bordering on gross negligence for the government to be ignoring that in our schools.

It is important as well to note that the starting point of any of these conversations and any of these individual cases is not to exclude parents. The starting point is of course to involve families as much as it is possible and as much as it is safe to do so. For a variety of reasons, though, students under the age of 18 years are sometimes asked to make decisions on their own behalf without the involvement of their parents or carers, which may include engaging with a health practitioner or allied health professional or going on an excursion. This is not new. This is not specific to the question of gender or sexuality. The department of schools have an obligation under anti-discrimination law to ensure that students do not face that discrimination, and that is a protectable attribute. Refusing to call a student by their preferred name or using their preferred pronouns is an example of gender identity discrimination. That starting position is and always is to work with families, but when that cannot be done, it is important that those supports are not withdrawn.

To be considered a mature minor, school staff must be satisfied that the student has sufficient maturity, understanding and intelligence to understand the nature and effect of their particular decision. In making this decision, a principal or other professional can take into account knowledge of and conversations with the student; their age; their level of maturity; their understanding of the issues and consequences; their living arrangements and independence; their previous academic results; the views of other members of the leadership team, relevant teaching staff, welfare staff, student support services or other external health professionals; whether or not another professional working with the student has decided that the student is capable of making other decisions for themselves; whether they will inform their parents or carers before or after making the decision; and whether it is in the student's best interests to make the decision with or without parental consent. These must be considered in order to make such a determination, and it must also consider the human rights of any relevant parties as set out in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

There are many other attacks that we are seeing on young queer Victorians, particularly young transgender Victorians. We have seen a report commissioned into the UK's National Health Service weaponised against the transgender community here in Victoria, that being the Cass review. A report which made recommendations on how the National Health Service over there could be reformed is being used as an argument to say that care provided in Victoria is inappropriate. Never mind the fact that those recommendations would in fact bring the UK into line with the practice as it already operates here in Victoria. It is not some magical wand that is able to be used to say that all care for trans people is inappropriate, but that is what some people are trying to turn it into to weaponise it for their own benefit.

I will finish by reflecting on the never-ending attacks and the shifting goals of the culture wars. Now it is fearmongering about social transitioning in schools and gender-affirming care or how libraries are evil, even. Before that it was about how banning conversion therapy was somehow wrong. Indeed I remind the chamber that the previous Leader of the Opposition – and who knows, maybe the next Leader of the Opposition – Michael O'Brien made a secret promise to repeal that ban passed in the previous Parliament. Before that it was how marriage equality would somehow ruin the institution of marriage. Before that we had the relentless lies and hatemongering about Safe Schools, and on and on it goes. Every time these arguments are based on predictions that prove to not eventuate. But they



always do one thing, and that is harm young LGBTIQ+ Victorians. And that is why I do not support this motion.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:17): I rise to speak to motion 622. The motion, as has been highlighted by the lead speaker, talks about mature minors and is calling on the government to mandate the creation of official records for declarations of mature minor status in Victoria. It goes to a range of things in relation to decision-making processes that affect young people in this very sensitive area.

I have just been listening to Mr Galea, and I did not want to interject or say some things, but I do think it was rather inflammatory in relation to what he was referring to about Mr O'Brien. I spoke in this house on the bill that you referred to, the conversion bill, and I had significant concerns about what the government was doing. My concerns were not about conversion therapy, my concerns were around the government not allowing medical practitioners to be able to –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER**: No, Ms Shing. You interrupt. I am on the record saying what I did.

**Harriet Shing**: You are a member of Liberal Pride, and you are going to vote for this.

**Georgie CROZIER**: I am making some points, and yes, you have a view. I have a very firm view around parental rights and the protection of children, as you do.

**Harriet Shing**: See you at Pride March, then.

**Georgie CROZIER**: I have been going to Pride March for a long time, Ms Shing. It does not change my views around parental rights.

**Harriet Shing**: Or your voting record.

**Georgie CROZIER**: I will read you what I have said. It is all on the public record, and I will say it again. In 2019 in the Parliament, I was talking about transparency around data that the Andrews government would not provide to the people of Victoria on this very issue. I was particularly concerned about a woman who I was referring to, Clair, a mother. She raised her issue around her 14-year-old. I will read it out. This was reported:

... she had been called by school counsellor “out of the blue” to be told her 14-year-old “socially awkward” daughter was a trans boy. The counsellor had been seeing the girl for three weeks without her mother knowing and had given her information about gender clinics and trans websites.

That mother, in my view – and I still hold that view that I held in 2019 – had every right to understand about her daughter, about the issues that were concerning her. This is a sensitive issue, and it is not every single child pigeonholed in the box that I am talking about. This is why the issue around records I think is important and transparency, because the mother actually fought for that daughter, and the daughter –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER**: I know you have got an issue about it, Ms Shing, but this is important. It is important for those parents who have contacted me regarding similar issues.

**Harriet Shing**: Have you spoken to Transgender Victoria?

**Georgie CROZIER**: I have spoken to a lot. I know trans people.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman)**: Order! This is an emotive issue, I understand that, and people have very strong views on it. Let us just try to keep this straight down the middle if we can.

**Georgie CROZIER:** As I said –

**Harriet Shing:** Bring your voting record.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I know, Ms Shing. I will get abused at Pride March. I will still march at Pride March because I have got gay friends and people that support the gay community. I am going to go back to the issue that I am concerned about now, as I was in 2019 – nothing has changed – because as this mother said, she took her daughter, and the daughter was found to have Asperger's. She had Asperger's, and apparently children – some children – with Asperger's can have gender confusion. That mother had every right to be concerned about what was happening to her daughter, who had a medical condition. Mr Galea rolled off all of the concerns around the considerations, the external issues, but he did not mention medical conditions. He did not mention that. That did not come into the issue, because –

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER:** I say again – and the government is exercised about this – you are not going to change my mind if you just keep yarking on at me. Right? You are not going to change my mind.

**Harriet Shing:** This is about suicides.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Yes, and there are people that are very sensitive about this, Ms Shing – very sensitive.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Seriously, grow up. Grow up.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! As I said, this is an emotive issue. I am not trying to stifle debate, but I just need people to get through this. We are all entitled to our opinions. It is a contest of ideas. As I said, I am not telling anyone to not say anything, but if people could just keep it nice – as nice as we can – we will move on through it.

**Georgie CROZIER:** You might remind the government. I say again: this is a sensitive issue.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** You can remind me of the voting record. It is on record, Ms Shing. Nothing has changed between now and 2019 – nothing. You might inflate this, but it is an important issue.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! To help this through, I think all contributions need to be made through the Chair. I think that will help us along.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Acting President, through you, this is a sensitive issue, and there are concerns from parents legitimately around these issues. I have just highlighted it. One I raised in 2019. My concerns have not changed. I know parents who have got children who are transitioning. I know their concerns and what they want to do to support their children transitioning. It is a sensitive issue, and it needs to be understood, and I think requiring records to be stored permanently, accessible upon request by any person who is declared a mature minor as a child or adolescent, is their right. Frankly, it is their right. It is their information. To hold that away from an individual says more about a government that is trying to protect I do not know what, but surely the individual has the right to that information when they are a child, a minor. So I say again – I have raised these issues for many years – I believe there needs to be greater transparency. The government does not give us that transparency. I have asked on several occasions around numbers and data, and I get very opaque answers back. This issue needs to be debated in a perfectly legitimate time, as we are doing now in the Parliament. But nobody needs to be demonised by this.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Acting President, you might want to tick the minister off, because she is just interjecting the entire time.

**Harriet Shing:** You take up my interjections.

**Georgie CROZIER:** No, I am not giving you that satisfaction.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! Though the Chair. If we can keep the interjections low – but in fairness to everyone, there is a lot of interjecting that goes around in this place. If people could just ignore it, that would be awesome and we could just get through it.

**Georgie CROZIER:** This is a motion that the Liberals and Nationals will not be opposing. I do understand that there are many very concerned people out there in relation to some extreme elements of what people might do, but this is around young people and their ability to have access to their information. I say again what I said in the outset: I have raised these issues, as I have highlighted, back in 2019, and I made a point around a parent who wanted to understand what her child was going through. I do not shy away from that. It is a legitimate concern for parents to be able to be involved where they can and to support their children if they are transitioning in what they are experiencing. It is a very important issue and one that should not be demonised, one that should not even be ridiculed by those opposite. It is important, and it is not an unfair debate to be had.

**Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:26):** The Greens will not be supporting this motion. While we have deep concerns about the potentially veiled motivations behind this motion, at the core of our objection is that it is actually based on a misunderstanding of the concept of a mature minor both from a legal and a practical perspective. Allowing this misunderstanding to go unchallenged risks perpetuating misinformation that is already in common circulation, and we have heard some of that already today, and that has the potential to negatively impact on young people and those who work with them. This is particularly the case for trans and gender-diverse young people who are seeking gender-affirming support, but it can affect young people in many different spheres of their lives.

I am going to have a go at clearing up these misunderstandings, and you will have to bear with me because I am going to get into the history of the concept of a mature minor. It has its origins in medical law, and it is sometimes referred to as Gillick competence. In 1985 the House of Lords made a decision that is the basis for the current interpretations of a mature minor. *Gillick v. West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority* dealt with a case where a health department provided advice to doctors that they could prescribe contraception to those under 16 at their discretion without parental consent. Victoria Gillick was a very passionate campaigner who campaigned against this advice. She felt that this was unacceptable and infringed on parental rights, so she took the area health service to the courts. Eventually this landed with the House of Lords to make a determination about this question of consent, and they resolved that someone under 18 years of age can consent to medical treatment if they have sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable them to fully understand the nature and effect of the particular decision they are making. They found that parental involvement in decisions is encouraged where appropriate, but for a decision where a young person is determined to be a mature minor it is not a requirement. This decision was strongly affirmed in Australia in 1992 when the High Court made a ruling in Marion's case. Gillick competence is now an established principle in common law.

While these cases may have been related to clinical situations, this is how the idea of a mature minor came to being, and it is now used in a range of contexts that involve young people and those who work with them, for example, in social work, youth work and education. What is important to note is that the assessment of mature minor status is context dependent. How well you know the child, the decision that is being made and the consequences of that decision have a critical bearing on whether or not the young person is capable of giving consent in that particular instance. What this means in practice is that a young person may be considered a mature minor or Gillick competent for one particular decision and not another. Let me give you a basic example. I am going to use a medical context because it is

easy for me to do that, but the same basic principles would apply to a teacher in a school. A 15-year-old might come to see me with a cut on their toe. It needs some cleaning up and a dressing, and after assessing the young person I determine that they are able to consent to me doing that: cleaning it up, putting a dressing on there. They are clearly able to understand the consequences of that treatment, and they fully get it. They are able to make that decision.

Let us say that same 15-year-old has a deep cut. It is badly infected, might involve the bone, and they need an X-ray. The treatment might require a surgical wash out, possibly even a partial amputation of their toe – we are not going to know that until they are under a general anaesthetic – and they might need a long course of intravenous antibiotics. I am just going to clear this up: I would be doing none of that in general practice, but let us just go with this as the example. I determine that the young person does not really appreciate the gravity of the situation, and they cannot consent themselves to any further treatment. In this instance they are not a mature minor – the same young person, different decision. A parent or a legal guardian needs to be involved.

These are crude and obvious examples, but they demonstrate how the decision being made determines a mature minor status. This is important, it is relevant to this motion, because people who work with young people might be making a mature minor assessment for the same young person multiple times a day about all kinds of things, and for each assessment they make they might make a different determination. There are some things that they are deciding about where, yes, that young person is able to give consent for that. But for other things, ‘Look, I don’t think that’s something they really fully understand, and their parents need to be involved.’ You do not just get declared a mature minor. It is not this threshold that you reach where you are just declared a mature minor and that is it, henceforth you can make decisions about yourself. It is not something that you could then practically keep some central record of: ‘You have been declared a mature minor.’ It is not like getting a licence or a registration number.

Determining mature minor status requires a nuanced situational assessment; it changes over time. It can go either way depending on what is going on in that young person’s life and their capacity to consider different issues. Mature minor determinations are actually typically recorded in a medical record. If you are seeing a young person, you would typically document that that person has provided consent. All issues of consent around any kind of treatment are generally documented, particularly for young people, because there are medicolegal implications, so you generally will document that. Those records are accessible by a person later down the track, but it is not something that you practically would keep a centralised record of, particularly for all those minor nuanced decisions and those determinations that are being made every day by people who are working with young people. I do not know how you would practically document all of that and keep it in a centralised record that you would access at a later date and go, ‘You were determined to be a mature minor on 15 different things on this day.’ From a purely practical point of view, this does not really make a lot of sense.

But let us get to the subtext of this motion and what we suspect is the real motivation for bringing it forward. I am going to keep it brief and simply restate the Greens’ clear position that schools and all places that young people inhabit and the services they interact with should be safe spaces for them to be who they are, where they are supported and empowered to make decisions for themselves where possible and appropriate, including our trans and gender-diverse young people.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:33): I really appreciated the contribution by Sarah. Thank you. It was very good.

Unfortunately, I have to reply to this. I wish that this motion was not brought forward. This motion is not about data, it is an attack on children in schools who are transgender or gender diverse. Gender identity is someone’s personal sense of being female, male, a blend of both, or neither. The physical features that someone was born with do not necessarily define their gender. Transgender children and adolescents do not identify with the gender presumed of their birth, and ‘gender diversity’ is an umbrella term for a range of genders expressed in different ways. Gender-diverse people use many

terms to describe themselves, and language in this area is dynamic. Young people are more likely to describe themselves as non-binary. Transcend Australia, the leading national body for trans, gender-diverse and non-binary young people and their families, estimates that 2 per cent to 3 per cent of young people in Australia identify as trans. To quote Transcend Australia:

Trans young people have always existed. Society and health care services simply have an increased level of understanding on how to support and treat people. Young people are feeling safer to express themselves, it is important they continue to feel this way without shame or stigma and receive the support they need.

A study in 2021 by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University found that around 78 per cent of trans and gender-diverse Victorians have faced unfair treatment based on their gender identity. Transgender students have the right to feel safe at school. The Victorian government and the Department of Education are committed to providing safe and inclusive learning environments for all Victorian students, including trans and gender-diverse and indeed LGBTIQ+ students in our schools. The department's number one responsibility is to support all students to feel safe and be safe at school, including LGBTIQ+ students. A student's gender identity is a protected attribute under law. It is against the law to discriminate against a student because of their gender identity.

Our starting position in schools is to work with families, and for a variety of reasons students under the age of 18 sometimes ask to make decisions on their own behalf, without the involvement of their parents or carers, including when affirming their gender identity at school. Schools will continue to engage with parents unless the student is a mature minor and does not wish to be engaged with one or more of their parents. I very much appreciated the previous contribution on that topic. Programs to support children that are transitioning gender, like Safe Schools, save lives.

The Labor government is proud to be inclusive of all genders. The coalition's support of this motion reeks of a leadership arrangement. It is appalling that the welfare of vulnerable young people who have historically suffered –

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On a point of order, Acting President, I would just like to ask that you please draw the speaker back to the actual motion, please, which is about providing documentation for mature minors.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I draw the member's attention back to the motion.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** It is disappointing that the welfare of vulnerable young people who have historically suffered from terrible discrimination is being thrown around this chamber like a political football. There is only one party doing that, and that is the Liberal Party. They are compromising the welfare of young Victorians in order for John Pesutto to preserve his leadership. Imagine voting with Moira Deeming on this issue –

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On a point of order, Acting President, once again this is an attack on the opposition, which has got absolutely nothing to do with this motion.

**Harriet Shing:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, every time we hear a motion from the opposition there are expansive contributions from people, and I would draw your attention perhaps to everything that Mr Davis has ever said in response to motions about the government. Critique is a part of the narrative which is advanced as a matter of course by the opposition. The precedent has been well set and established in fact by Mrs Herman's side of the aisle, and on that basis I would say that the member is being entirely relevant to the point of the motion.

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On the point of order, Acting President, regarding the comments made by Ms Shing, this is a motion that has been put forward by Moira Deeming, not by the opposition per se, so I think it is important that we keep the topic on hand to the actual content of this motion and do not start diverging onto attacks on the opposition.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** From what I heard prior to this point of order, the member was reflecting on the opposition's view on this motion. I am satisfied that that is within the relevancy of discussing this motion. I ask the member to keep the focus on the motion.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** I am utterly confused as to why Mrs Deeming was expelled in the first place if the Liberal coalition are going to vote in support of this. It is –

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On a point of order, Acting President, I am sorry, this is again not about the actual motion, which is an incredibly important motion and a very sensitive motion and it has been provided on behalf of vulnerable people. So I think it is incredibly important that the person who is actually speaking keeps that in mind and stays on topic.

**Harriet Shing:** On the point of order, Acting President, as Mrs Hermans has just indicated, this is about vulnerable people, and on that basis Ms Ermacora is outlining the very damage that is being caused because of the trivialisation and the political horse-trading that is being undertaken by those opposite. Again, there are so many examples of the opposition reflecting upon various positions taken. Ms Ermacora is responding to a contribution made by the opposition and is perfectly entitled to do so.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I would remind the member to focus on the motion, including reflections on other perspectives on the motion, but keep it to the motion where possible.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** I am very excited to get to my last two sentences. So this is about vulnerable people and this is about throwing them under the bus for the sake of a political career, and I once again affirm the government's position on standing up for LGBTIQ+ people and their community, and I will be voting this despicable motion down.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:42):** I rise to speak to Moira Deeming's motion, and I would like to actually start to go through this motion with a little bit more detail given that there have been a lot of motives impugned to this motion that are definitely not there. Even the actual mention of the LGBTIQ community is actually not in this motion, and so I am not really sure why there is so much anxiety when we are actually looking to provide the most vulnerable people, young people, the opportunity to be able to access their own data and records and for records to actually be made to protect them and to provide them with some sense of understanding in the decisions that they make and the way that they got to those decisions. I think that every person deserves to have access to that type of record making. I want to go through the motion a little bit if I can:

That this house:

- (1) notes the Department of Education's duty-of-care policy affirms the importance of harm minimisation when caring for children and adolescents ...

I do not think that there would be a single person in this chamber that would have an objection to point (1). At the end of the day –

*Members interjecting.*

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** Acting President, I am sorry, I cannot hear myself with the objections that are coming across from the other side of the chamber, which are really inappropriate. They are completely inappropriate.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Mrs Hermans to continue without assistance.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** I do not think there would be anyone here that is actually prepared to say that they are not wanting to support and protect young children and adolescents and that we all accept the Department of Education's duty of care affirms the importance of harm minimisation. I think there would not be anyone in here who would not – not even the Greens sitting here. While we may object to a lot of things, we all actually recognise the importance of harm minimisation and the duty of care to children and adolescents.

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, I am just wondering as a point of clarification whether this means now that the coalition does support the Safe Schools program as part of harm minimisation initiatives within education.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** I am sorry, this has got nothing to do with the motion. Could we please keep this on this important motion that these people deserve to have put forward?

**Harriet Shing:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, Mrs Hermans has just said, 'I do not think that there is anyone in this chamber who would not want to ensure that harm to children is minimised,' and on that basis I was getting to my feet to ask in fact if that means, as a point of clarification, that the coalition now supports the Safe Schools program that it initially and repeatedly opposed over many, many years.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** There is no point of clarification in the standing orders.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** I would really appreciate it, Acting President, if you could allow me to use my time without having to deal with interjections from Ms Shing.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Please continue.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** Okay. Point (2) affirms that children and adolescents have the right to access accurate records relating to their own mature minor declarations. It does not matter what sex they are or what their sexual preferences are, to deny any person the right to have access to accurate records, we are setting up a state that is actually going to not allow people to have their own medical records and their own data and their own information on counselling. I have family that are doctors, so this is not an ill-informed conversation or even opportunity to speak that I am putting forward here. People deserve the right to be able to access their own records. How can they access their records if all these records are not being kept? The reason that we are actually really concerned in this area, or at least I am, is because I have met young people that have been through the process of transitioning who have said, 'We cannot access information through this process. We cannot get this data now.' And that concerns me. So it:

- (3) calls on the government to mandate the creation of official records for declarations of mature minor status in Victoria, including but not limited to:
  - (a) details of the child/adolescent being declared, their parents or legal guardian, the adult, employee ...

These are just simple details. If a person is actually being declared a mature minor, this information should be recorded. I know that Sarah rightly said that, as doctors, they keep these records. What concerns me is that it may be in some processes they are not being kept as accurately or as carefully as they need to be because technically it would mean that anybody that wishes to access this information should be able to through an FOI or through any other process. So:

- (b) all information relevant to the mature minor status decision, including the specific purpose the status was granted and the reason for determining sufficient maturity and intelligence to understand the decision, including, if possible –

'if possible' is key –

- (i) knowledge of and conversations with the child/adolescent ...

Usually in case management records and in psychology assessments these records are kept. Psychologists write down and keep records, and in case management, social work and youth work I know that I as a case manager had to keep records. So one would think that these records are being kept, but I think the issue here is that a person should be entitled to be able to see those if down the track something develops and they go, 'You know what, I want to understand that process.' That is why I am really surprised that those opposite and even the Greens are saying they do not actually want

to allow this to take place. This is not about impugning motives. I do not understand why this idea of trying to turn this into something like a culture war is necessary. It is not necessary. This is about –

*Members interjecting.*

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** Mr Galea talked about the culture war, and I know that others have also mentioned it as being impugning motives that are simply not written here in the motion. You cannot see anything of that here in the motion. This is about providing people with the opportunity to be able to have records made and to be able to access those records down the track should they want to. I think that is for anybody that has been declared a mature minor.

I know that in the original case it was set up for young people particularly that were suffering from abuse. In the instance, let us just say, of a situation where there was incest or where there was physical sexual abuse taking place in the home where the child needed to have particular care, being a mature minor allowed them to be able to have that medical attention that they required. I know that that has been used in years gone by to allow doctors to help children in situations like that in the original early cases, and I say that having had a family member that has worked as a doctor with children who have been abused. So I know that it has been used in that instance. There are reasons that these things were set up, but the issue here is: are we going to deny people that have been declared as mature minors the opportunity to, number one, have proper records made when they are vulnerable and young and making decisions, some of which will be life altering? Are we going to deny them the right to have access to those records – complete records to be made and access to those records – so that they will be able to fully comprehend and understand decisions that have been made in their lives as mature minors in terms of anything to do with a medical process or an educational process? It is talking about support services and health professionals et cetera that work with a person who is declared a mature minor.

That is what this is about, and it is not to impugn motives that are simply not written into the motion or that are not there. It is to understand that everybody that is in this society and in this state should be able to access medical records that are made on their behalf at any age should they really need them for whatever reason. For their own mental health and for their own understanding they should be able to access them. In some cases this has not been the case. It has been very difficult. So it is simply putting this into writing and simply allowing this motion to be put up as a way of actually showing, yes, you do support the rights of children, you do support the rights of the vulnerable, you do support mature minors and you are prepared to allow them to not only have records made about things that are important to them, but also to be able to access them as an adult. That is what this is about.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (16:52): It has been a very interesting debate at the moment. I have learned more about mature minors and stuff like that in the last hour or so than I have ever learned, and it seems to me that the point of declaring someone a mature minor is that they are able to have a decision-making process that a person of that age may not necessarily be legally allowed to. It is a way of recognising that they are more mature in their outlook on something than their age may belie. That is all great; I do not have a problem with that whatsoever. My issue is I guess I am actually stunned that these records are not already being kept further down the track, because you are allowing minors to have –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jeff BOURMAN:** There is no mandating. Moving on, these records should be mandated for the child's own protection, if nothing else. Down the track they may want to know what goes on. I am not getting into the trans thing. I am not getting into anything else, but it is actually telling that we just passed a motion in this place for more record keeping for greyhounds and here we are fighting about more record keeping for our vulnerable children. I will be supporting this. I am not part of the culture wars or any of that sort of stuff.



**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Bourman has just drawn parallels between LGBTIQ+ young people and dogs, and I would ask that he withdraw that immediately and unconditionally.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Just on that point of order, I actually did not. What I did do was say that this place needs to have a look at itself at times, and it needs to understand that this is not all about culture wars. In this instance it is about record keeping. To insinuate that I think that LBGTQI+ people – and I apologise if I have left one out – are the same as dogs I think is frankly insulting to me because I would never do that, and I think the minister knows me well enough now.

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, I am proud – not always proud, because it is hard to be proud in the face of so much appalling invective – to be a member of our LGBTIQ+ communities. I am personally offended by the way in which Mr Bourman’s sentence was constructed in inviting a comparison between the content of this motion and its effect, whether intended or otherwise, and parallels drawn between that and record keeping for animals. I would ask that he withdraw on the basis that I take personal offence to the way in which that sentence was constructed.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I will ask Mr Bourman to withdraw.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I withdraw. But I will finish up by saying that I do support this. If nothing else, I just think, for the medical records of children down the track, this should have been mandated from day one.

**Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (16:56):** I rise to speak on Mrs Deeming’s motion, and it is a motion about record keeping – that is what I see in it. And surely we should all support the concept that when anything is done to anybody in the medical space particularly, proper records should be kept and they should be accessible. I cannot see that this is controversial. We now have a situation in the health system where our records are available and kept. This is absolutely in the same category, so I do not understand why there should be any controversy about it.

We know that sometimes and for a variety of reasons students under the age of 18 wish to make decisions on their own behalf without the involvement of parents or carers, and if a student is considered a mature minor under the department’s mature minor and decision-making policy they can make decisions for themselves without parental consent. When this happens schools can play a role in supporting the young person. However, that can include the social transitioning of students from one gender to their chosen gender by changing their names and informing other students. Given the mature minor system, this can occur sometimes without the knowledge of parents. In March this year the Minister for Education replied to Moira, as I understand it, saying:

The department does not collect data on Victorian government ... students who have been declared mature minors by an adult on school grounds.

This is frankly outrageous. Of course they should.

To go to these comments that have been made by some on the other side, this is not about a gender war. This is about ensuring the safety of children, and it is ensuring that as they become adults they can access records that caused a change in their life, potentially. It is absolutely right that they should have access to all the details of their mature minor status as it was used in maybe changing their gender.

Some of those who are most violently opposed to the transitioning of children are homosexual men and women. I stand alongside of them on numerous occasions, and they are the most concerned about this. I do not understand the attack on those that are proposing or supporting this motion – that somehow this is an attack on the LBGTI+ community. It is not. It is about children and adolescents under the age of 18 making decisions without, maybe, their parents’ involvement but then in later life being able to access the information. I do not understand why anybody would think this is an issue.

I think it was Mr Galea who referred to the Cass report. This is a landmark, comprehensive report on the highly questionable practice of transitioning children using medical intervention. These processes

are irreversible. They are life changing, and they have consequences for the rest of their lives. I do not know whether those on the other side have ever been dealing with any detransitioners, but the lives of many of them have been made hell. Their physical situation has deteriorated, and of course it transpires that they had often psychological issues which caused them to think, and others encouraged them to think, that changing their gender was going to solve all their problems. Some of them have reported that domestic abuse was involved, which was why they thought their life would be made better if they went down this path, only to find their problems have got worse both physiologically and psychologically.

I think we have to do everything to make sure that children, whether they are mature minors or adolescents, have every capacity to access treatment and advice and counselling on how they can solve the problems that exist in their lives without physically changing their bodies for life. The surgeons who deal with this say that under the Hippocratic oath 'Do no harm' they do not want to be in a position to completely change a perfectly healthy body into something that is not a perfectly healthy body. You know, psychologists have been demonised for questioning this whole process. But all we are asking for here is to have these records mandated so that these adults, if they become adults, can access the records that caused them to be in the situation they find themselves in in later life. On that basis, we ought to be supporting the motion.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:02): I will try to stick very closely to the motion. Mr Galea made some comments about mature minors and how this law is actually interpreted and how it needs to take into account the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and all these sorts of things, and I agree – that is true. Also Dr Mansfield made comments about the medical context with Gillick competence and these sorts of things, and of course that is also true. Dr Mansfield made the very correct observation that in medical contexts these records are kept, and they would need to be kept, so that is fine. But actually what I think Mrs Deeming is referring to is situations outside the medical context. If you are making these decisions, needing to take into account the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, needing to make decisions about whether a child in this particular context for this particular decision is competent to make that decision or not, then it seems very strange to me that one would insist that records do not need to be kept. In fact the comments by the government and also by the Greens would seem to strengthen the case that Mrs Deeming is asking for, which is that records should be kept in these scenarios.

As has been pointed out by other contributions in this debate, some of these decisions are life-changing decisions, decisions that are made without parental consent. With some of these decisions made by children, they do in fact later in life come to realise that they have made a bad decision. They have made a bad decision, and it makes total sense that if they want to examine that, or indeed if they want to take legal action, because there are children who have later become adults and decided that they want to take legal action for things that were done to them by medical professions or indeed by the state itself, then they should have the ability to understand those decisions that were made and the thought processes that went into them and whether or not the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities was taken into account, whether Gillick competence was actually established and these sorts of things. The idea that these records are not necessary, the idea this can just be considered by someone in the school context and no records need to be kept and there is nothing that is able to be accessed in the future is frankly astounding considering the gravity of some of these decisions and the complexity. As has been pointed out by the government and the Greens, these are complex decisions that have many things that need to be taken into account and they should be kept on file, as is the case, as pointed out by Dr Mansfield, with doctors.

Doctors would not make these sorts of decisions without keeping a record. They keep all sorts of records for their patients. But in a school context, it does not have to be a doctor of course – it can be a teacher or indeed many other people that work within schools that can make these decisions. The idea that people think it is optional whether or not these important decisions have some sort of record, I find frankly astounding. If people are going to decide that children can make decisions without their

parents' knowledge or consent, then records need to be kept for that. It is a very big decision, a very big action, to decide that without parental knowledge or consent. If you are going to override the rights of parents, you had better make sure that you get all your t's crossed and your i's dotted because this is a very serious thing.

We do not even know how many times these sorts of decisions have been made in schools, because there are no records. The government does not care about whether these records are kept. The government cannot answer how many times mature minor considerations have been taken into account, because there are no records. This is frankly an outrageous situation. Every parent in Victoria should be outraged by the government's negligence, frankly, in this regard. These records must be kept.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (17:07): I thank everyone for their contributions today. I will just address some of the points that were raised today. Mr Galea raised bad faith actors in this space, people who hijack legitimate concerns by people like me and others and do spout hate and do make people like you feel uncomfortable. I just really do not want to give those kinds of people any attention or any empowerment. They do not have the right and they should not have the power or the ability to block us in this chamber from putting in ordinary child safeguarding standards and record-keeping standards that are just for the children impacted.

I did not demand that parents be told. As a parent I think they should be told, but I did not demand that today. I did not even ask for that today. I did not bring it up. I just asked that the kids themselves have the right to proper full records that they can go back to later if they need to.

I think it is discriminatory, since you brought it up, but this is actually the issue – the most serious and most high-risk decisions that can be made, as far as I can see, and that are commonly made are, yes, to do with gender transition in schools, which is being hotly debated all around the world. You cannot just say I am making up these concerns. They are legitimate medical psychological concerns, and they are borne out of love for kids just like you have. I am not trying to eradicate anybody; I am trying to make sure that there is proper care and that whatever we do it is based on evidence and reasonableness and that we are being careful with children.

It is discriminatory not to protect them and not to demand that records be kept. What a disgrace. What a disgrace to make this about something else, such a simple motion. It does not mandate that records are kept; it says that people can. Any adult on school grounds can consider these things and can declare them a mature minor.

Can I just say that from the perspective of a teacher, it is absurd to equate having the authority of a teacher to govern, basically, and have authority over kids as something that I have to keep signing off on every day when I tell them 'Stand up', 'Sit down', 'You've got detention', 'Hand in your homework', 'Be quiet' or 'Remove yourself'. I can do all of that without filling out a form. That is ridiculous. Again, what an absurdity. Nothing that was said by you about what I said was actually contradictory to what I said.

Bringing up marriage equality and hate speech – I mean, that is just ridiculous. That has got nothing to do with anything here. This is not about children's particular sexuality or their particular gender identity. I have told you there is no limit to what can be applied to these decisions. There is no limit. Can you imagine? There is no limit to other people and what they can decide behind a parent's back and what a kid has the mental capacity to consent to. But why would they do it in any situation that was not serious, where you would not need to usurp parental rights and give mature minor status? And I am so sick and tired of people in this chamber and everywhere in society telling LGBTQ kids that if someone disagrees with them they hate them. What a disgraceful thing to do to children – stop telling them that they are hated. I am sure they actually do get enough genuine hate; you do not have to add imaginary hate to it.

The idea that it is okay for other people to declare my children to be mature minors because they might know my child very well – it is context dependent. Get out of here – nobody knows my children better

than me. And if you think you do, that still does not give you the right to usurp my parental authority. I am a teacher; I am one of the people with the authority to declare your kids a mature minor. Does that make you uncomfortable? It should, because there is no way that I would know enough about your child in the interactions that I have in these big groups of children in whatever context that I have to make a decision like that. There is a saying: if you do not believe what the students tell you about me as a teacher, I promise not to believe what they tell me about you as a parent. All right? Let us just not forget that we are dealing with children, vulnerable children.

The other thing that was pretty disgraceful was the line that I heard that this motion is somehow throwing children under the bus. That is illogical and absurd and offensive. I do not know if anybody here noticed, but I am absolutely willing to burn my career to the ground for child safeguards, so that absolutely is garbage. Oh, my goodness, there are lots of other situations where this could be important. You think about the Rotherham rape situation: that was allowed to go on further than it ever should have even gotten, because they were not keeping good records – basic things are basic child safeguarding. All right, that is it; I am done. Thank you very much. Let us put it to a vote.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (15):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (20):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, 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

**Motion negatived.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

*Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:18): I rise to make a statement on the report of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into vaping and tobacco controls, which was tabled on 29 August 2024. The PAEC report is important and confirms what we had feared – that children and young people are the most profoundly impacted by the harmful use of e-cigarette products. There was clear evidence that legislative action to combat the proliferation in the use of e-cigarettes among our young people not only was necessary but also will be life saving, and I am glad the federal government has moved on that. The inquiry showed that the use of e-cigarettes in our community has more than doubled in the past four years, with 373,000 regular and 128,000 non-regular users in Victoria. By 2022–23, 7 per cent of Australians aged 14 and over were using e-cigarettes, compared with 2.5 per cent in 2019. It was 2.5 per cent in 2019, and three years later 7 per cent – a huge increase.

What the committee's report found was that children and young people are impacted the most by this trend. We cannot turn a blind eye to this problem anymore, and we cannot pretend we do not know the dangers of vaping. We know that vapes have over 240 different chemicals in their e-liquids, and that includes arsenic, the same that is found in rat poison; benzene, the chemical found in gasoline; and formaldehyde, which is used to preserve dead bodies in morgues. These chemicals are toxic and dangerous, and they can lead to anything from breathlessness and lung damage to many forms of cancer. The presence of nicotine in vapes is of primary concern, a highly addictive substance that can not only trap our young people into a lifelong struggle with addiction but also cause significant damage to lungs and other bodily functions from vaping-associated lung injuries and nicotine poisoning. Nicotine dependence among children is becoming a serious health and behavioural issue in our schools.

If the health consequences were not enough, the committee found that vaping costs users between \$790 and \$1320 a year, with the vaping and tobacco industry costing Victorian taxpayers \$5 billion a year. The report also found that while it is young people who are the major users of vapes, it is only increasing. In 2019 only 5.3 per cent of e-cigarette users were aged 18 to 24. This grew to 20 per cent of e-cigarette users being 18 to 24 by 2022–23.

Vapes were developed as a Trojan Horse to get a new generation addicted to nicotine. Tobacco control across the world started in no small part here in Victoria with the passage of the groundbreaking Tobacco Act 1987. Tobacco control was working and working well. Smoking rates were falling, particularly amongst children. Big tobacco was worried, so they invented new products – vaping and e-cigarettes – and they started telling lies about them. One lie is that they are not harmful like cigarettes. The PAEC report and the evidence put lies to that. They are cocktails of harmful chemicals flavoured like bubblegum. Another lie is that they are a tool to help smoking cessation – to help the addicted quit. This is also a lie. Vapes are tools to get people addicted.

The latest evidence published just last week in a British medical journal shows that in England the number of adults who use e-cigarettes despite never regularly smoking has risen sharply to around 1 million people – a million people in England who vape but who never smoked cigarettes. Vapes are tools to get people addicted, and as always, big tobacco is targeting young people. If young people are at the heart of the problem, the work of VicHealth in prioritising young people is at the forefront of solving it. For the next two years the state government will be working with local government and VicHealth alongside sporting, education and community groups to spread the word on the harms of vaping. VicHealth's Uncloud campaign shares peer-reviewed scientifically backed information about vapes through the perspectives of young people.

I have been a strong advocate for tough action on vaping. In my inaugural speech I singled out this issue as being an emerging health challenge that needed addressing, and I will not stop talking about the harms of vaping until our children are safe from these dangerous products. That is why the PAEC report is such an important piece of work, and I thank my colleagues.

The main recommendation from that report is that in order to address the harms from vaping we need to have a robust legislative framework to prevent harm. Australia was set to be the first country in the world to restrict the sale of vapes to those with a prescription under laws proposed by federal Labor. Sadly, those strong protections proposed were opposed by the Liberal Party and watered down by the Greens. I am incredibly disappointed that the federal Greens watered down Labor's prescription-based approach and insisted that vapes be sold over the counter at pharmacies, just like Panadol and jelly beans. Vapes are a dangerous product, and the PAEC report shows us this.

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

#### *Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria*

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:23): I rise to speak on the education report that was tabled in this place yesterday. The inquiry into the state education system in Victoria was sobering and eye-opening. We heard from burnt out teachers and we heard from kids that were experiencing chaos in the classroom and poor student outcomes. One teacher even said, 'It's a good day at work when you don't get assaulted.' We heard from students who found classrooms so chaotic and stressful that they had to find other options to get the education that they deserve. It is a well-known fact that over the past two decades there has been increased funding into education; however, it has been met with a decline in outcomes. Something has gone terribly wrong.

We have seen from reports that the education system in this state has continually failed and is failing children. The Grattan Institute published a report that said one in three Victorian children do not meet literacy standards, and devastatingly that number rises even further to one in two children in regional and rural areas. In Victoria our education system is failing to prepare the next generation of children for their futures, and it is especially failing country kids. Many have raised concerns about schools

becoming a hub of indoctrination rather than a centre of education. This inquiry found that the curriculum in Victoria is overcrowded, and it recommends that the Victorian government should ensure that the curriculum is regularly reviewed and updated to reduce duplication and to ensure best practice. Children should have equality of opportunity, especially when it comes to education. Children should not have poorer outcomes based on the postcode that they live in. However, in Victoria that is their reality.

Another finding is that 2023 NAPLAN reading scores for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were constantly lower for inner and outer regional Victoria compared to major cities. There is a recommendation – well, there are a lot of them, but this one in particular I certainly welcome – that the Victorian government set a long-term target that 90 per cent of students reach proficiency in reading and numeracy as measured by the proportion of students in the strong and exceeding categories in NAPLAN in those years and a short-term target to an increase of 10 percentage points over the next 10 years based on NAPLAN performance in 2023. These are targets that I welcome because we need to do better for the kids that are being educated in this state.

Many teachers said their workloads were so varied and so heavy that as little as 10 per cent of their workday was spent on actual teaching. They felt they were not equipped to deal with what each workday brings. Universities do not teach teachers how to teach, or they do not teach teachers how to manage a classroom, and students and teachers alike are fraying under this pressure. The committee found that there is a need for improvement in the depth of support and guidance provided to schools which support whole-school curriculum planning, and it recommended the Department of Education review the whole-school material and lesson plans for core subjects such as maths, English and science to ensure their aims of reducing the burden on schools planning and delivering their curriculum.

Recommendation 10 is that the Department of Education audit the existing literacy assessment and student diagnostic tools, ceasing those not consistent or complementary with the structured literacy approach.

Recommendation 11 is that the Department of Education introduces a 40-word phonics check in year 1 in all Victorian schools in line with the Commonwealth phonics check – that it sets a target that 90 per cent of students reach the expected levels in phonics in their checks by the end of year 2 and that phonics checks should adopt a national best practice in line with the national phonics checks. This is a strategy that is long overdue, and it is something that the coalition has long advocated for. I am excited to see this logical and obvious step be taken in this state.

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

#### *Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:28): I also rise to speak on the report of the Legal and Social Issues Committee, that being the report into the state education system in Victoria. I did share some brief remarks just yesterday when this report was tabled, but I will use this opportunity to expand and elaborate ever so slightly on them. I think it is important in doing so that I first acknowledge the immense hard work that goes in day in, day out from our teaching staff, from our teachers and our principals but also our support staff, our admin staff, our student welfare officers and all the other people who come together to make the education system what it is for young Victorians. We do have, as this report indeed shows, some very encouraging results. We have consistently high levels shown for reading and maths. There is lots more to do, and that is where it is also very exciting to see the announcement which came partway through the inquiry of the implementation of the phonics approach to teaching in schools, where again there was leadership shown by the Minister for Education, Minister Carroll, in doing that. It was extremely well received. Dr Heath will no doubt agree with me that it was enthusiastically endorsed, this approach, by many people.

**Richard Welch** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** By the masses, even – yes, Mr Welch. It was enthusiastically endorsed by those experts and teachers who came before us.

We did get lots of great insight from teachers, indeed from parents and students themselves, from right across the state of Victoria. On our very first day of hearings – I know this will excite you, Ms Lovell – we were in Shepparton, and we heard from some local teachers. We also – in fact not in this inquiry but in the vaping and tobacco inquiry that Mr Batchelor was referring to earlier, also in Shepparton – had some fantastic student leaders from Greater Shepparton Secondary College come and speak to us about vaping and some of the challenges faced by school students right across Victoria when it comes to that issue. Indeed on the very first day of this inquiry I took the opportunity to ask a primary school teacher from the region about the trends that she had observed with vaping when it came to her students, and the answer was quite alarming for me – that it was virtually universally accepted from grade 4 and above. She said it was very rare to see someone in prep or grade 1, but apart from that, vaping was not all that uncommon. That was a very interesting perspective to hear from that teacher, which of course also led into informing us on the other committee as well.

When it comes to the education system we do have a very proud record in this state of investing in our schools, especially under this government. This is a government that has built or is in the process of building 100 new schools, which will be opened within a couple of years time, many of them in my region, in the south-east. On top of that we are upgrading countless schools as well, because in order to have the best education possible you need to do so in the best environment possible. Whether it is Mirniyan Primary or Wulerrp Secondary College opening next year or whether it is Topirum Primary School, which opened this year as well – just a few small examples in my region – these new capital schools and indeed the take-up of these new schools as they are opening really goes to show the need for good education services in all parts of Victoria, whether it is inner Melbourne, outer Melbourne or indeed the regions.

Another point that is worth touching on of course is with regard to funding. This is a government that is unashamedly funding and supporting our schoolkids. One of the most significant investments for cost of living for busy Victorian working families as well is that \$400 school savings bonus, which is able to be taken up for use from term 4 this year. Every government school student in the state of Victoria has the ability to have \$400 in their account for school camps, for excursions, for uniforms and for other incidental costs of schooling that so often do add up for busy working Victorian families. It is great to see this initiative rolling out and indeed many others as we continue to build Victoria as the Education State.

In order to do so of course we really need to continue with getting that full swathe of support from all levels of government when it comes to education funding too, which is why I also reiterate my support for recommendation 54 of this report, which calls on the Victorian government to continue its advocacy for Victorian students to get our fair share of Commonwealth funding. I will leave my remarks there on this report for now.

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

#### *Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:34): I rise to speak on the Victorian government's response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's report into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria, which was tabled on 12 September 2024. Recommendation 27 of the committee's report says that the Victorian government should develop community engagement programs for areas where it plans to increase density, and that:

The programs should address community concerns and provide information on why density must increase, including its social and economic benefits.

The government's response to this recommendation is to support it in principle.

The Labor government claims, as is its usual practice, to engage with the community and stakeholders for all significant strategic work, including areas where density increases are proposed, but we all now know that that is not true. The government response refers to the 10 locations and activity centres pilot program but fails to mention that activity centres are not the only places where the government hopes to increase density. Labor want to radically transform rural and regional towns, but they are not doing any significant work to engage the local communities. It has given housing targets to regional local government areas across Victoria that will push councils to accept increased density in rural towns but has never consulted properly with the rural and regional communities about how these changes will affect them. Mitchell shire has been told that it must increase housing in its area by 312 per cent. Similarly, Macedon Ranges Shire Council must accommodate another 12,700 homes among its small country villages. The Minister for Planning is currently entertaining developer proposals for increased housing density in rural towns where such density is completely out of keeping with the rural character of those towns and goes against long-term planning principles that were put in place to preserve the charm of small towns.

The government pretends that it wants to consult with local communities, but in practice Labor is busy changing the rules to force councils to approve radical development proposals and then stripping the rights of residents to appeal inappropriate developments. Everyone knows we need more housing, and there are some appropriate places for mid-density developments in metro and regional city centres as part of infill programs. But enabling microlot apartments and townhouses in greenfield rural developments is completely inappropriate. It creates car-dependent suburbs adjacent to rural towns where the infrastructure simply cannot handle the massive boom in the population and traffic.

The proposal under consideration for Amess Road in Riddells Creek, Macedon Ranges, would actually double the population of Riddells Creek. It would double the car traffic into town, double the commuters waiting for a train at the station, double the number of shoppers in the supermarket car park and double the number of kids needing a place in kinder or schools. The community of Riddells Creek have raised their concerns about this inappropriate development with the minister through their lower house member Mary-Anne Thomas, me and other upper house members. They are particularly concerned that the consultation conducted by Engage Victoria is flawed, as they were advised by Mary-Anne Thomas that only 118 submissions had been lodged when the figure was actually well over 1000. The community wants the flawed consultation to be scrapped and to start again, but instead of listening to the community the minister has pushed ahead, with Mary-Anne Thomas announcing yesterday that the minister has referred the application to Planning Panels Victoria.

This morning I delivered a petition of signatures collected over the past two weeks that bears the signatures of 1278 Victorians who are opposed to this application to the minister. I seek leave to table a copy of that petition now.

**Leave granted.**

**Wendy LOVELL:** The development plan in Amess Road is completely out of keeping with the character of the rural town and goes against long-term planning principles adopted by the shire to preserve the relaxed and spacious feeling of its country towns. This application was rejected by the Macedon Ranges council and then lodged directly with the minister via the development facilitation pathway. The minister must listen to the local community and the Macedon Ranges council, who know that this development will not deliver positive outcomes for current or future residents of Riddells Creek.

**State Electricity Commission of Victoria**

*Report 2022–23*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise today to speak on the State Electricity Commission of Victoria's annual report 2022–23. It is a particularly apt time to speak on this report as many in this house will remember that just over a month ago we voted to enshrine the SEC in the



Victorian constitution, and just yesterday in the other place the Allan Labor government members finalised this process and officially gave the State Electricity Commission constitutional protection. This will protect the commission from privatisation by those opposite and for all the many generations of Victorians to come. Through the constitutionally protected SEC we are returning power to Victorian hands and we are driving down energy bills, and that is because Victorians deserve nothing less. The SEC will be a one-stop shop for all Victorians looking to electrify and slash their bills. The SEC will begin piloting simple and effective solutions to make it easier to electrify your home and help Victorian households to reduce their energy bills and emissions too. The SEC will deliver more affordable, more reliable renewable energy owned by Victorians, with every cent of profit being reinvested into the SEC. We are putting an initial \$1 billion towards the delivery of 4.5 gigawatts of power through new renewable energy and storage projects. That is enough to power more than 1.5 million homes, and this is only the beginning.

Even as we set up the 100 per cent publicly owned SEC the market is investing strongly in Victoria, ensuring that 95 per cent of our generation will be from renewables by 2035 and we will hit net zero by 2045, the most ambitious targets from any mainland state. The annual report relates to the activities of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria in 2022–23, which is the body that will be replaced by the new SEC. The report does not relate to the establishment or activities of the new SEC, but it will be helpful to provide us a comparison point when I report, undoubtedly, on the new SEC in the future.

The original SEC, as the honourable member for South Eastern Metropolitan might remember, was established back in 1918 as a statutory body responsible for the generation and distribution of electricity throughout the state. This body, called the SECV, still exists a statutory entity under the Former SEC (Residual Provisions) Act 1958. However, following its disaggregation and privatisation by those opposite in the 1990s, ongoing activities have generally been limited to the management of legacy assets, the liabilities and the information requests. We have much bigger and better plans for the SEC, which is why I was so proud to play a part in giving it constitutional protection in September.

As we now move to bring the SEC back to its former glory, supporting working Victorians to access renewable energy and slash their energy bills, I am happy to relay to the house that this report reflects a strong foundation from which to build. The report shows that the current SECV is operating at a nearly \$5 million accumulated surplus, and it invested nearly \$300,000 in the 2022–23 financial year in operating costs to support Victorians via its legacy assets. This is what the SEC can do, despite the attempts by some opposite to completely gut its operations. I cannot wait to see how a revised SEC under the Allan Labor government will deliver cost-saving renewables for working Victorians.

### *Petitions*

#### **Little River freight terminal**

**David ETTERSANK** (Western Metropolitan) (17:42): I rise to speak on the petition before the house, and I move:

That the Council take note of the petition presented by me on 27 August 2024.

The fight to halt the Little River freight terminal had all the hallmarks of an epic battle: a corporate giant up against the plucky little community and environmental groups trying to save the highly sensitive grasslands that surround them. It has been a thrilling ride so far.

Little River is located south of Werribee in a green wedge zone. It adjoins the renowned Ramsar wetlands of Werribee South, which has a greater diversity of birdlife than Kakadu National Park. Crucially, it is surrounded by the critically endangered Western Plains grasslands, the last 1 per cent of volcanic plains grassland in Victoria. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action describes the area as an:

... irreplaceable grassland ecosystem ...

which was once:

... filled with delicate orchids, wildflowers, birds, reptiles, insects and marsupials, some of which were found nowhere else in Australia ...

which have:

... almost disappeared due to clearing for agriculture, grazing, and urban development.

The initial plan was to acquire the land and restore the Western Grassland Reserve. I will talk about that later, but let us return to the fight at Little River and the petition before this place.

In 2021 Pacific National announced plans to develop a mammoth freight storage facility on this highly sensitive land, which is home to hundreds of native species, including the critically endangered growling grass frog, striped legless lizard and the golden sun moth, to name a few. On top of the direct damage to the grasslands, this ill-conceived project would have resulted in an estimated 2 million shipping containers a year passing through the site and thousands of truck movements through the area on a weekly basis. It was an environmental disaster waiting to happen, and the proposal was condemned by stakeholders across the board, including the City of Wyndham, who rejected Pacific National's planning application. Hats off to the council for their courage and vision.

Then in 2023 the Minister for Planning invited Pacific National to prepare an environment effects statement. We met with the Little River Action Group around this time to start to work on a strategy for a campaign. I have rarely seen a community take to organising with such focus and flair. I speak for myself and my fantastic staff when I say it has been an honour and a privilege to work with the Little River Action Group. The community gathered almost 5000 signatures for the petition before us, and to put that in some perspective, that is about three times the size of the township itself. And then last month Pacific National announced that it was withdrawing its VCAT action to overturn Wyndham council's decision.

However, Pacific National appear to have not so much abandoned the project as to have shelved it for the time being. So the battle was won but not the war – which brings me back to the Western Grassland Reserve. In 2006 the Victorian and Commonwealth governments endorsed the Melbourne Strategic Assessment to acquire, remediate and preserve 15,000 hectares of Western Plains grassland in recognition of the importance of preserving this fragile ecosystem. The MSA identified 43 sites of preservation and gave developers permission to clear the rest. Developers pay an offset fee to be used to fund the purchase of the Western Grassland Reserve, but the whole endeavour has gone the way of so many of these well-intentioned but underscrutinised projects, where the environment carries all the risk and the property developers reap all the rewards. Irreplaceable remnant native grassland is being bulldozed and traded for grassland of inferior environmental value, and the land acquisition program after 18 years is only 20 per cent complete.

But this little win in Little River is worth considering in the wider context of the MSA. I call on the government to continue to acquire, remediate and preserve more land for the Western Grassland Reserve and to include the Little River freight terminal site.

This battle against Pacific National is an example of what communities achieve when they mobilise and fight for what they believe in. Now all we need is for the government to step up and demonstrate its commitment to the community and the environment by acquiring this strategic and precious site.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (17:47): I would like to begin by thanking my colleague Mr Ettershank for bringing a voice for those residents into this chamber. This process is an important part of our democracy and has directly resulted in today's debate. I also want to acknowledge the people that signed the petition and expressed their concern about the proposal. I think it is safe to say the energy has been taken out of this debate before it even began, with the news of this project no longer proceeding, so I also want to acknowledge the Little River Action Group, which you mentioned, Mr Ettershank.

I did want to share a little bit about the planning process and how we got to this result from the government's perspective. Under the Environment Effects Act 1978 a planning authority can refer a project to the Minister for Planning if it has determined that the environmental effects of a project need to be further understood. The minister may then direct the proponent to prepare an EES, or environment effects statement. The Minister for Planning decided in December 2023 that an EES was needed for the Little River logistics precinct project application. On 19 September 2024 Pacific National advised the Minister for Planning that the Little River logistics precinct project will not proceed for a range of reasons, and instead they will focus their efforts on their operations at South Dynon. As a result the EES no longer needs to go ahead.

For those interested in the history of this matter, in 2021 the Victorian government recommended development of a new interstate freight terminal in Truganina in Melbourne's west, known as the WIFT, the western interstate freight terminal. This terminal would be needed to ensure Melbourne continued to have the interstate rail freight terminal capacity it needed into the future. Since then a few things have changed. The Commonwealth have endorsed the recommendations of an independent review of the inland rail project, which prioritised delivery of a new terminal in Beveridge in Melbourne's north ahead of the delivery of the WIFT. Work is now underway by the Commonwealth on progressing the Beveridge interstate freight terminal. The role of these new terminals will be primarily to handle interstate freight but also to import and export containers. These Commonwealth and private sector terminals will provide sufficient capacity to handle forecast interstate freight volumes in Melbourne over the next medium term. To provide certainty the Victorian government extended the lease at South Dynon in Melbourne's west until 2051 in May this year.

Whilst the WIFT remains a priority for the Victorian government, its delivery will be deferred until when it is needed. The government will now look at protecting land at Truganina for WIFT. This process may also help unlock land not required for the WIFT for industrial development in the short term. The department will continue working with key stakeholders as the planning process is determined to enable the protection of the land at WIFT. Again, I would like to thank those who signed the petition and all those involved in the advocacy of that community.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:51): I rise to speak to Mr Ettershank's petition. As Ms Ermacora said, this is part of our process to be able to have communities have a say. I was just looking at some of the information that has been on it, and I do not know if you were at the rally, but there was a crane – and you are nodding, yes, you were there and obviously speaking to the community. There were concerns by that action group, the Little River Action Group, around the freight terminal and the impacts to that town. Those people of that township have spoken about their concerns and about their extent, and I think they had a 25-metre crane. I was just thinking we have just had the activity centre debate, and 25 metres is, yes, quite an imposing distance, but in terms of the planning approvals that are going on and the government not consulting with communities again around their concerns, I think those towers that are going to go right across Melbourne are a massive concern.

Nevertheless, to get back to Mr Ettershank's important petition, there are concerns around how it will impact on that local community, with various aspects around the agricultural and environmental areas as well as the impacts to road traffic et cetera and the freight terminal itself. We do need trade in this state. We need a lot of trade given the debt that the state is facing, and there are important projects, but they need to be considered, and communities need to be taken into consideration or have their considerations heard by government and those making these decisions. This is, as I said, an important issue for those people in that area. Mr Ettershank has called on the state Minister for Environment, Mr Dimopoulos, to intervene, and good luck with that, I say. But again, good on you for raising these concerns in the Parliament on behalf of your community.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (17:54): I am really heartened to speak on this petition today, knowing that the community have successfully shown us the strength of their united voice and

that the proposal has been withdrawn by the proponent. The fact that this project was ever on the table, though, highlights several problems that the state government has failed to address.

Firstly, the Labor government has no cohesive strategic vision for transport and freight movements specifically in this state. Getting freight off trucks and onto rail is important for reducing transport emissions, improving road safety and mitigating road damage, but without a statewide plan for intermodal terminals, private interests will drive the location of these terminals, often to inappropriate places.

Secondly, it highlights the failure of the government to genuinely protect the little that remains of our incredible native grasslands, as Mr Ettershank has outlined. While this has been a win for the Little River community, it also grants a reprieve for our grassland and the many species that call it home. Grasslands may not have the ability to capture the imagination as readily as a marine or forest landscape, but they are no less beautiful or important. For example, recently the earless dragon, once thought extinct, was discovered again in the Western Plains. Then there are the golden sun moth and the growling grass frog, also endangered species that live in our western grasslands. Less than 1 per cent of Victoria's grasslands remain intact and in diverse condition, and the Victorian volcanic plain where this proposal was to be built is already the most cleared region in Victoria. They have been destroyed through agriculture, industrial and housing development as well as weeds and competition from introduced species.

Grasslands like this are often misidentified as empty spaces, perfect for development of both housing and major infrastructure projects. Before identifying so-called green corridors for development, industrial or residential, it is important to understand the location of these grasslands, especially those that are habitats for vulnerable species. This proposal has highlighted the flaws in the Melbourne Strategic Assessment approach, which has failed to ensure adequate public ownership of grasslands as well as adequate enforcement of conservation measures on private land. There has also been a failure to include environmental protections in the Victorian planning scheme. This was highlighted really well a couple of years ago when conservation area 9 in Truganina was destroyed by a developer who cited uncertainty in the state planning laws.

While there is short-term comfort in knowing that this proposal will not be proceeding for now, the threats to our grasslands remain and a comprehensive transport and freight plan remains elusive. This saga should serve as a wake-up call for the Labor government on both critical issues. In the interim, however, I would really congratulate all of those in the Little River community for their incredible campaign. I would like to thank the community and Mr Ettershank for their advocacy. It has been a huge win, but there is plenty more work to do.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:57): I rise to make a contribution to this petition sponsored by my colleague David Ettershank. Firstly, I would like to thank the almost 5000 Victorians who signed this petition and acknowledge the extraordinary effort of the Little River Action Group. As a direct result of your advocacy, Pacific National have decided not to proceed with the Little River logistics precinct project. The way that your community came together to protest, to form an action group and to spread your story across Victoria was so impressive. It was a testament to how seriously you understood the harms of this proposed development on your community.

I would also like to congratulate my colleague David Ettershank and his team on their involvement with this incredibly successful campaign. As both your colleague and your neighbour here in Parliament, I got to see and hear about your advocacy right from the start. Your passion was clear, as was your determination to elevate the voices of the Little River community. Thanks to your work and that of the local community, we have prevented 75 football fields of destruction. We have stopped traffic, noise and light pollution, and we have stopped the threat to critically endangered wildlife and rare grasslands.

But it is regrettable that we are even here and getting to that point. As the president of the Little River Action Group aptly pointed out:

It makes no sense that residential development is banned on the green wedge, but they are proposing an industrial freight monolith in ... a fragile and threatened ecosystem.

These wedges were put aside for a reason: to keep the city's air clean and buffer western Victoria's farmland from contaminants. These wedges are for the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. With this in mind, the announcement that the Little River logistics precinct project will not proceed is a welcome one, but as my colleague David Ettershank noted, we have won the battle but not the war. As it stands, this land will be land banked indefinitely until Pacific National decides on a future development, so we are stuck here in limbo. There is a real risk that the same plans for development emerge over time, or perhaps there will be plans for an entirely new industrial development. Again, we do not believe this will be appropriate for Little River. As my colleague has highlighted, this green wedge is a sensitive environmental site, and any development would threaten critically endangered native animals and could destroy rare grasslands. There is unanimous support from the federal and state governments to preserve these grasslands, but support is one thing, action is another. This environment must be protected through land acquisition, something this government says it is doing but which is a process that is incredibly slow. There is a need for a network of conservation reserve areas and management programs. We call on this government to act on this need before we lose any more of our irreplaceable native environments. This is the only way we can prevent a Little River 2.0.

I would like to conclude by again thanking the people of Little River and all those across Victoria who made their voices heard and prevented this development. When a community act, they can make change.

**David ETTERSANK** (Western Metropolitan) (18:01): Firstly, may I thank the other speakers on this motion. I would also like to thank the council offices and the government advisers who assisted us in shaping such a good outcome. I would like to take this opportunity also to say how delighted we all were to see the Little River Action Group and the campaigners at the Grassy Plains Network awarded an Environment Victoria 2024 community environment recognition award for their outstanding work.

I noted in my contribution the fact that Pacific National have shelved their plans to build a freight terminal in Little River, but they have not abandoned them. I also touched briefly on the Melbourne Strategic Assessment and the Western Grasslands Reserve, noting that only 20 per cent of the land has been acquired since the project's inception in 2006. Almost 20 years after it began, the Western Grasslands Reserve project has not significantly progressed. The notional 15,000 hectares of those grasslands make up the last 1 per cent of Victoria's volcanic grasslands, as Dr Mansfield quite correctly identified. This incredibly sensitive area is highly valued by the people of the west.

In my members statement this morning I spoke on the question of public transport and how many residents in the west feel unheard and underappreciated. They may well feel the same when it comes to tree coverage, open space and clean air. While the residents may have saved the grasslands this time, it is only a matter of time before the next act of approved environmental vandalism is dumped upon them. So I reiterate my call on the government to take further action to protect Melbourne's green wedges and the western grasslands and to acquire this precious site at Little River in particular.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Production of documents***Commonwealth Games**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:03): I move:

That this house notes the failure of the Leader of the Government to comply with standing orders in relation to the resolution of the Council on 1 May 2024 for the request for documents relating to the 2026 Commonwealth Games bid.

I will start by stating the obvious: yesterday midday was the deadline for the production of these documents. I have received nothing as yet from the Leader of the Government.

I will go through a couple of points here. Firstly, even though this motion was moved by me, these are not documents that are wanted by me personally or the Libertarian Party. They were requested in my role as chair of the committee in order to obtain documents that were resolved by the committee to be important to their investigations into the Commonwealth Games bid. I take this responsibility seriously and wish to exhaust all avenues available. The government, through their inaction on this, are effectively holding the committee and, frankly, the Parliament in contempt, in my view, by not making any effort to use the standing orders that we have available through the process of an arbiter to determine whether executive privilege is in fact valid or not. I note that this process has never been used in Victoria; however, my understanding of the process and how it should work, how it is meant to work according to the standing orders, means that these issues can be resolved through the process of an arbiter.

I am disappointed that the government has not gone through this process. I do not know whether it is a lack of trust in my ability to keep confidence or whether the government does not trust an arbiter who might be appointed, but nevertheless the government is simply not following the standing orders. I would say more generally the documents production process in this chamber is clearly broken. The government routinely comes back with a letter saying that it is going to take a bit more time and then you never hear anything ever again – the process is broken. I would like to say that I am open-minded, and I believe others are open-minded here, about us looking at changing the process. If the government does not like this process or cannot use this process for whatever reason, I would like to in good faith try and negotiate something that is acceptable to the entire chamber that might be workable. I understand that there may be instances where orders for documents may be potentially unintentionally far too wide and that there is no process to –

**David Davis:** This is certainly not such a case.

**David LIMBRICK:** Well, this is not such a case, because these documents have already been identified; an assessment by the government has already been made. So in this particular case I feel that there is no excuse for not using the arbiter process that we have available to us. But more generally the process is clearly broken. It is quite rare that documents are produced. I note that a document that we requested was the report into tobacco regulation, which the government still did not produce even though it had already been leaked – a draft of it at least, not the final version – to the media and it was in the public domain. The government still did not produce that even though it – or the draft at least – was pretty much already available and in the public domain.

I suppose others will have views on this, but the non-production of these documents I believe is hindering the work of the committee to carry out its important role in looking at the decisions around both taking on and then abandoning the Commonwealth Games and also the regional infrastructure rollout, which is another part of the committee's work. Clearly this is hindering that work. The vast majority of these documents have not been handed over, and I can only conclude that the government is not keen for the committee to do a thorough job of what this house has resolved to be their work. I believe others will have things to say about this, but I would like to express my disappointment that despite this, we have not received anything to date.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:08): I think this is very sad, that the government has refused to avail itself of the procedures designed to break a deadlock on documents. There is an independent arbiter process in the standing orders. The independent arbiter process could have been used. It is routinely used in New South Wales, and there is a high degree of trust in that process. Respected jurists have been given the role of acting as arbiter by the Legislative Council in New South Wales. The standing orders here are modelled directly and explicitly on the New South Wales approach, and there is no reason why the government cannot behave as New South Wales governments of all colours have behaved in the past. These standing orders have only been in operation in this way since the 2014 change of government. The new standing orders came in at that point. They have never been used.

**Jaclyn Symes** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, we did give documents in government.

**Jaclyn Symes** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** We did. We complied with almost every single one. And if we did not, we actually wrote to the chamber in some cases and made the point that documents, for whatever reason, could not be provided. We asked the chamber respectfully not to insist, and it never did. And the fact, of course –

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** It never did. We treated it with respect. We actually did. Very carefully, there was deep response. But there was no standing order that provided a mechanism for a dispute resolution or for an arbitration. There was no –

**Jaclyn Symes** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, it is a fact. It is not an excuse. It is a fact. There was no such standing order. It did not come into operation in the Parliament until after the 2014 election.

**Jaclyn Symes:** You were never forced to supply anything, so you just did not bother.

**David DAVIS:** I am sorry, but the standing orders changes were made at the end of that Parliament, and they came into operation in 2014.

**Jaclyn Symes** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** No, I am just being quite clear: you cannot comply with a set of standing orders if they do not exist. The arbitration power did not exist in Victoria in that sense.

The obvious thing here is that there is something that the government has to hide – hundreds of documents and no sensible reason advanced. The Attorney-General ought to be prepared to act in a direct way on this and actually provide the documents to the arbiter. She can do this; there is nothing stopping her in the world doing that. The standing orders of the Parliament are quite clear. The only reason the government are not providing these documents is because they are embarrassing to them. That is the simple fact.

**Jaclyn Symes** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, if you say that, why don't you test that? You could test it. It is a simple fact here that the government is determined not to provide the documents. In my view, looking at the documents that are listed, the government is over-egging the claim of executive privilege. An arbiter will quickly work to the truth of it. An independent arbiter, appointed by the Parliament, could quickly and swiftly deal with the facts here.

I just do not understand why the government is so afraid to release these documents. It is because it is an arrogant government, it is a tired government, it is a government that is determined to close down the provision of information. Mr Limbrick is right, the government does treat the documents process with contempt. It is a carefully written set of standing orders. It was agreed to by all parties, actually, in 2014, and then brought into operation after the election in 2014. The fact is, Minister, your party has been in government for the whole of that time, and on each occasion it has sought to block the use of these arbiter powers. There is no reason for that other than the secrecy and the decision of your government to try and defy and block information from the Parliament. It is arrogant, it is unfortunate, and the truth of the matter is that this is your opportunity now to actually live within the standing orders of the Parliament.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (18:13): I feel like I have given the same speech about the government's failure to produce documents and their failure to comply with standing orders regarding executive privilege so many times now that I am actually at risk of plagiarising myself. I am not quite sure whether I will have said the exact same thing before, but I will give it a go.

I think it is unsurprising that we are here. The fact that the government wanted this debate to be moved to this part of the week before they had even responded to the motion suggests that there was never any intention to comply with the standing orders. There was never any intention to comply with what the motion was asking for from the very outset. The complete disregard for the request in this motion displays, I think, a real arrogance and a hubris that is becoming a hallmark of this government on so many issues. They did not even have the courtesy to respond to the motion to say they were not going to comply. They just ignored it. The government has every right to make claims of executive privilege. You have heard not a single argument from anyone else in this place that you do not have that right. You can claim executive privilege. There is an argument about whether your definition of 'executive privilege' is too broad, but even putting that aside, you have the right to make these claims of executive privilege. That is not the issue here. The issue is that when you do so you just follow the standing orders of the Legislative Council. That is all we are asking – that the agreed-upon standing orders of this Council are followed. If you believe that your claims are legitimate, as Mr Davis said, then there is absolutely no reason you should be worried about following the required process. The steps are clearly outlined, and you just refuse to do so, have always refused to do so and seem to indicate that you will continue to do so.

The fact that you refuse to follow the standing orders really suggests, though – I mean, it is hard not to come to this conclusion – that you are worried that your claims do not hold water. If you are so worried about following the standing orders – why? What is it about the standing orders that is a problem? As Mr Limbrick said, if it is the standing orders themselves and we need to come to a new agreement, fine, let us maybe work on that, but these are standing orders you have agreed to. So why are you not following them? It suggests strongly that you do not believe that they would hold up to the process, because if you did, you would follow the process and everything would be fine.

I think the other issue is that if you do not think your claims are going to hold up to scrutiny, what are you then afraid of being discovered as a result? If it was found that executive privilege does not apply, what are you trying to hide? We know from the Commonwealth Games inquiry so far that there was some seriously flawed decision-making that went on. It was not around the cancellation of the games – I do not think that has been the issue – but the decision to hold the games in the first place was clearly very poorly informed. If government decisions that involve such potentially significant amounts of expenditure are based on such flimsy business cases, like they were in the case of the Commonwealth Games, and if decisions are made in such a rushed manner with such poorly coordinated processes, what other significant decisions are being made in the same way that would also benefit from a bit of scrutiny early on to prevent the government making decisions that perhaps are not as good or as sound as they probably should be given the significance of them?

We can look at the situation of the proposed demolition of the public housing towers. The government I think in court have claimed that there are no documents, but then we had a similar documents motion



to the Commonwealth Games one in this chamber. We were told as a response to our initial documents request that there are too many documents, actually, not that there are none. We were told there are too many and it would cost too much and take too long to provide them all, so we agreed to a revised scope of documents, and almost all of those documents that were identified as being more reasonable and in scope – all but a handful – have had executive privilege claims made over them. Once again the process that is required under the standing orders has not been followed. For such a consequential decision for so many Victorians, the very least the government could do is provide some documentary evidence to support this decision. The fact is they will not and the fact is that they will not even follow the standing orders. Again, you have every right to make claims of executive privilege, but the fact that you will not follow the process suggests once again you have something to hide and are afraid of scrutiny. Just as with the Commonwealth Games decision, it is one that may well benefit from some public scrutiny, from some parliamentary scrutiny and from some transparency.

I have said all of this before. This is really a fundamental issue. It is a question of transparency, a question of integrity. The standing orders are there for a reason. On this particular approach that the government are taking, the way that they have repeatedly refused to follow the standing orders when it comes to claims of executive privilege really shows a lack of respect for this Parliament, but moreover it shows a lack of respect for the Victorian public, who we are elected to represent. I would strongly urge the government to reconsider their approach to these claims going forward. I am not holding out a lot of hope that things will change, but I think as Mr Limbrick said all of us are open to finding a better way forward when it comes to this process, because it is clearly not working. If the government does not think that these standing orders are appropriate, rather than just continuing to fail to follow them let us figure out a way that we can come up with a system that everyone can agree on and that will be followed and that does allow for some test of these very broad claims and these frequent claims of executive privilege.

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (18:21): I would just like to support the comments that have been made by my colleagues Mr Davis, Mr Limbrick and Dr Mansfield, who have spoken already. I particularly want to pay tribute to Mr Limbrick as chair of the Select Committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid. It is fair to say that Mr Limbrick has been an excellent chair. He has been incredibly fair in the way that he has conducted the committee's work and led that, always engaging in good-faith actions. You could not ask for a better chair in terms of integrity and transparency and openness, so Mr Limbrick, I really do think you deserve all the credit that you receive, because you have done an excellent job in chairing this process so far.

What has been disappointing is that obviously the deadline for the production of these documents was yesterday and they have not been forthcoming. It is almost like there is a trend of deliberate frustration of the work of the committee in order to get to the root of the matter. And the way to get to the root of the matter – the cause of the Commonwealth Games cancellation and so forth – is to get access to documents. Another action we have seen is the refusal of the Premier to appear before the committee. We do not know why. Because these documents have not been produced, we are unable to get to the work that we want to be able to do.

I guess the real question is: why? We want to be able to know: why these documents? There is a process that is outlined in the standing orders if there is a question about whether or not executive privilege exists. We are able to go through and make a determination whether that executive privilege actually exists or not. If there is genuine executive privilege, then I think everyone who has been engaging in this process has been doing so in good faith, and if the government do have a genuine executive privilege claim, why are they so afraid to test it? If they are afraid to test it, why is that? If they had the temerity to go through and test it through the arbiter process, we would be able to determine rightly or wrongly whether there is a claim of executive privilege. If there was found to be an executive privilege claim, it would be upheld and we would carry on with the work of the committee. But until that process has even been engaged in there is no way to determine that, which is a great shame.

You have just got to ask the question: why is that the case? Why is there a reluctance to engage in that process? Any reasonable person would conclude that there is something to hide there – there is something that is hidden that the government does not want released. As others have said, it might be embarrassing or it might cause the government to feel as though the questions about the decisions that they have made in the past could all be revealed in front of us all. For someone like me, I value transparency and I would like to see that at least, but I can understand why the government might have a sense to feel embarrassed about it, because they might reveal that some fairly average decisions were made. I do not know, but I would love to be able to have access to the documents so I can at least make a determination on that. We are not even at that point yet.

But the whole point of going through this process is to get to the truth, to get to the truth of the matter, to help the committee do its work. This is the committee that has been set up by the Parliament to inquire into this. It is not just a committee that has been willy-nilly formed. This is a committee that the house, this chamber, has agreed to, and step by step the work of that committee has continually been frustrated, unfairly in my view. So I do support this motion, and once again I hope that the committee can get on with its very important work of getting to the heart of the matter, which is what the whole purpose of the committee was in the first place.

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (18:25): This is addressing the motion that has been moved by Mr Limbrick to set up this debate. At the outset I would also acknowledge the letter that Mr Davis wrote to me on the same topic on 5 September, very politely reminding me of the standing orders and the process that is in New South Wales, and pick up on Dr Mansfield's contribution, which was a really constructive contribution. I understand you expressed some frustrations, but importantly you expressed a willingness to engage in conversations in relation to doing things better, and I am certainly of a similar view to you.

I am in the process of examining the standing orders and their application to document motions in this place. I have commenced conversations with the New South Wales members of their government and people that are familiar with their processes. It is not a simple process. It is not a matter of just changing things and introducing something that has never happened before without careful consideration of how that might look. As I said, never in this place has the standing order which is the focus of this motion been used. It is not straightforward given the immense volume and frequency that we are seeing with document motions coming into this place. It would be an incredibly unsatisfactory outcome if we were to set up an arbiter process that was just swamped with documents, examinations and requests, and I think picking up on Mr Davis's concerns and allegations that the government over-egg executive privilege, it would be a concern to me that we would be on fishing expeditions of massive requests of documents that are all carted on trolleys into an arbiter's office to test whether the government are bona fide in their claims of executive privilege or not. Obviously you have a distrust of government, it is your job to hold us to account, but I can assure you – I sit in on the processes – it is about getting legal advice, including from the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office and sometimes the solicitor-general's office, to inform the executive's decision of claims of executive privilege.

I am the chair of the legislation committee – it goes to the committee; Minister Blandthorn is on that committee, as well as members from the Assembly. Very often we are faced with a situation where I have got ministers that do not want to claim executive privilege because the document would be beneficial to the government's interests. That is not how you go about deciding whether executive privilege applies or not. You take the advice, and you are agnostic to the document that is being discussed. It is not about whether you look good or you look bad. There are established principles and legal advice that I guard very seriously in my role as Attorney-General and my role as the chair of the legislation committee. However, I do acknowledge that of course you have got questions, you have got concerns, you would like documents.

It is not a matter of just giving documents. I think most people have at least expressed some understanding of the fact that there are certain appropriate cases where documents that are within the possession of the government should not, for the benefit of the public or the benefit of the operation

of the government or the executive or for community safety reasons, be given. Everyone I think accepts that premise; however, I am not quite sure you are there, Mr McCracken, in terms that your view is that you should be given everything so that your committee is facilitated to do its work. I would argue that there are instances where it is appropriate for documents to be detained for particular reasons, and I think I have outlined those.

Clearly there are a range of views in the chamber regarding the application of executive privilege. I have had a number of conversations, my office have had conversations, I think some of the advisers in the Premier's private office that support this chamber have also started to engage with members of the chamber. I would note that on 29 May the government started to want to have these conversations about variation of scope of orders for the production of documents – things that we would want to see put in place before you were to go to an arbiter-type process. We would want to make sure, as I said, that the process works and is not abused by the sheer volume or by frivolous claims. You are accusing us of holding up documents. I want to say that I think we should create a system that protects the system from being abused by non-government members to try and justify the request for transparency.

**David Davis:** Your party agreed to these standing orders.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Just implementing standing orders without consideration of how they would apply is irresponsible, Mr Davis, but I think you could tell from the tone of my contribution today that I am open to these conversations. I welcome the invitation for a new agreement, a better way forward, and that is a commitment that I am willing to give. I think that we can work towards an outcome here. We cannot rush it, and we need a set of parameters about how it would operate and what we are going to stick to, because as I said, I do not think simply implementing the standing orders without consideration and a discussion about how it is going to operate is a satisfactory outcome.

I would urge people to be constructive on this and work with the government to come up with a suitable system that would work. I would like to remind you to revisit some of the suggestions that we have looked at in relation to the motion that Ms Blandthorn read in, which is 449 on the notice paper from the government. It gives you an indication of some of the issues that we are concerned about in progressing this. I do welcome some productive conversations going forward on this matter, but given the way that this motion is worded we will not be supporting it. But hopefully we can have some productive conversations outside the chamber.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:32): I seek leave to move:

That the clerks write some notes for everyone on New South Wales and how it is operating.

#### **Leave refused.**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:32): As a member on the Commonwealth Games committee I have certainly been involved in hearings and involved in the discussions, and I was a party to the motion that was put forward. In fact I amended it to be debated today so it was in a non-government period so we would not take up any of the government's precious time bringing in legislation. I will not go over the topics that we have heard before. We have talked about executive privilege, and I thank all the other members for leading the way on that for Mr Limbrick, who I think is trying to stand in a moderate space and do the job of the chair of these sorts of committees. He has got many of his own agendas, but I actually think he is trying to be reasonable. I think it is reasonable to comply with the standing orders of the Legislative Council, and I take on board and echo the frustrations of the Greens and thank them and agree.

What I have heard from the leader of the house today is in relation to a willingness to do something better, and we need to look at what that would look like. Before I go into that space, I am doing this from memory, but of those 350 outstanding documents –

**David Davis:** 353

**Melina BATH:** No, but we have got three of those. So of the 350 that are outstanding still, from memory some of them go to the village in Morwell, the potential site of the Commonwealth Games village in English Street; some of them talk about wastewater; some of them talk about the topography; and some of them talk about the make-up of the soil. I find it hard, just personally from a superficial point of view, to understand the level of executive privilege that is being claimed on some fairly simple documents. The government can do and have done that, but I would have thought in good faith that they could have had a bit of a rummage through those 350 documents that are left and found something there that would have shown the committee is barking up the wrong tree and does not need to see these documents. I just fail to understand how 350 could be that highly sensitive that the government would want to keep them not only from us but from the Victorian Parliament.

We, a little while ago in this place, had a two-day conference where members of our electoral office staff came down, and it was a fantastic conference by all considerations. There was a mixture of people, and it related to the processes that occur in this house on a Wednesday. I had two of my electoral office staff – one has been serving for almost 10 years. They sat around and they spoke to other electoral officers. The running joke with the government's electorate officers is that this is 'Wacky Wednesday' and that it is to be held overwhelmingly with – I will not say contempt, because that is a very strong word – ridicule and trivialities. I think that is really disappointing when, clearly, we are all elected to this place, and we need an opposition. The government has just said that it is important to have an opposition and to have scrutiny et cetera, but when there are elements within the standing orders and the process is followed through and the government disregards those, now it is such a big headache.

This government has been in for nine years, and no, it has never been enacted, we will say, in those nine years. Now it is coming to fruition that is a good idea, and we have heard that from Leader of the Government today. Well, I would like to understand what that actually looks like. The minister has said that they are willing to do something. I think the point that my colleague Mr Davis was going to put is that if that good faith is there and there is a willingness to do something, then perhaps the Leader of the Government could constructively ask our table office, our clerks, to come back with what that framework would look like moving forward, so that when we on this side of the house ask for these documents, to work through something that is working in the New South Wales Parliament, that is an accepted –

**Jaelyn Symes** interjected.

**Melina BATH:** You have had your turn, Minister. You could have kept on with that discussion. Now I am getting yelled at for having a position. I am asking the Leader of the Government, in good faith, to come back to this Parliament, to come back to this house, and explain to us, maybe with a working document that the clerks have organised, how we could move forward. Mr Limbrick brought this up, that the process is not working, so I want to see and understand how the Leader of the Government is going to facilitate what she is speaking about in this house tonight and how we can move forward, because clearly the people of my patch in the Latrobe Valley, who were going to have this Commonwealth Games, were revved up. There were people who had poured their heart and soul into this and were doing a lot of work anticipating this – and finances. That is something the government need to understand – their own finances. To then have 350 claims of executive privilege – I think it is a bit of a slap in the face.

#### **Council divided on motion.**

*Ayes (20):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaele Broad, Katherine Copsy, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (15):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney

**Motion agreed to.**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:45): I seek leave to move:

That the clerks compile a summary document of the New South Wales Legislative Council's procedure and processes concerning –

**Leave refused.**

*Adjournment*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (18:45): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Camping regulation**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:46): (1183) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Premier. What seems like a brainwave inside the Premier's office can have unintended consequences for small business people in regional communities, and it is that which I am going to speak about in my adjournment tonight. The action I seek from the Premier is to provide the house and the people of regional Victoria with the modelling that the government undertook on the impact of its free camping policy on regional caravan parks operating close to national parks, where it will apply. I would like the Premier to outline how the Allan government will support and/or compensate caravan park owners or operators facing a substantial loss of business. While the initiative may be aimed at cost-of-living pressures, it is already causing serious distress for small business operators in my Eastern Victoria electorate, and indeed I or my staff have spoken with many of them today. Prom Central Caravan Park in Foster is one such example. The campers at the Prom Central are certainly a vital part of Foster's tourism economy, helping to stimulate cafes, local eateries, supermarkets, gift shops, the butcher and service stations, and this is comparable right across our small towns that nestle in close to national parks and now to free camping. Free camping at Tidal River campground certainly will be well adopted, I am sure, particularly right throughout that six months, but it is going to have an impact on that Foster caravan park, particularly in those off-peak travel times.

We have also got Les Heyne, who operates Marlo Ocean Views and Orbost caravan parks, and he estimates that he could lose up to 30 per cent of the occupancy of his businesses and hence 30 per cent of his profits. He said to me that people have rung his caravan parks already, saying, 'Can you match the government offer?' A small business can match the offer by offering free camping in their own organised caravan park. He said this is going to be on top of the insurance, which has gone up 33 per cent, and electricity – the electricity in our state, he is saying, has gone up 40 per cent in his caravan park. This is a region that has been hit by drought, COVID, shocking bushfires and the closure of the native timber industry, and it is an absolute disaster. Not only that, we have got local people in the Waratah Bay Caravan Park saying the same thing.

The Victorian Caravan Parks Association proposed to work with the government on a solution, a voucher system to be more fair and equitable, but that has not come through. We want to see the survival of our small towns, our small communities and our small caravan parks, and this government needs to help to do that.

**Sanitary bins**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:49): (1184) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. Sanitary bins allow for the safe disposal of personal hygiene products. This can include things like period products or incontinence aids. They clearly have an important role, and yet

in half of the bathrooms they usually do not exist: men's bathrooms. Those who use men's bathrooms instead flush their waste down the toilet, creating blockages, or throw their waste in rubbish bins, creating a health hazard. Some may just go without or opt to use disabled bathrooms, which just limits access for those who need accessibility.

There are a number of reasons that those who use men's bathrooms may need to use sanitary bins. Those with medical needs like stomas and incontinence may use incontinence pads and pull-up pants. The BINS4Blokes campaign represents 1.3 million boys and men who experience incontinence. They advocate for sanitary disposal bins in men's toilets to allow men living with incontinence to get out in their community with confidence. And of course sanitary bins are an essential part of menstrual hygiene. Not everyone who menstruates is a woman, and it is important that all bathrooms have sanitary bins so anyone who menstruates, no matter their gender identity, has access to a sanitary method to dispose.

To a degree, the location of sanitary bins and how disposal occurs is a discretionary exercise, but there are minimum requirements enshrined in legislation, including a national construction code. This states:

Adequate means of disposal of sanitary products must be provided in sanitary facilities for use by females.

I strongly encourage the federal government to consider updating this code and those responsible for providing toilet facilities to place sanitary disposal bins in all bathrooms they provide.

I would like to give a shout-out here to the councils that have been proactive in making change. The City of Melbourne has already put sanitary bins in several men's bathrooms in council-owned facilities. Melbourne Airport has sanitary bins in the gender-neutral toilets.

It is time for the Victorian government to lead by example and install sanitary bins in men's bathrooms. By doing so we send a message that those who use men's bathrooms deserve equal access to sanitation services. So I ask: will the minister ensure those who use men's bathrooms in Victoria are afforded dignity and respect when using public bathrooms by requiring the installation of sanitary bins in men's public toilets?

### **Cooba solar project**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:51): (1185) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action that I seek is for the minister to reject the application for a permit to build the Cooba solar project in its proposed location. I recently met with constituents in Colbinabbin and saw the incredible view of wide green fields on the gentle eastern slope of the Mount Camel hill range. But if the Allan Labor government has its way this view will be destroyed and replaced with 740,000 solar panels and 300 batteries the size of shipping containers.

The proposed Cooba solar project will cover a massive 665 hectares in some of the best wine country in Victoria. There are over 30 wineries along the Heathcote-Rochester Road, which bring a constant stream of tourists to the area who are looking to enjoy the fresh country air and beautiful scenery while they sample delicious local wines. Dozens of wineries have invested in cellar doors and infrastructure to make the most of the view and attract tourists, but this giant solar farm could soon spoil the view and ruin the best efforts of local businesses.

A recent petition to the Victorian Parliament garnered 1362 signatures in opposition to the solar facility. Vintners, farmers, local residents, business owners and the Campaspe Shire Council are not against renewables, but this is not the right location for a massive solar farm. Community support and social licence are essential for efficient and smooth energy transition. The rollout of new energy installations must be sensitive to existing uses of the land where they hope to build and respectful of community concerns.

The Victorian government's own planning guide states that:

A solar energy facility should not lead to ... the loss of productive, state-significant agricultural land ...

In particular the guide says careful consideration should be given if a solar farm will mean the loss of a productive site that:

... has high-quality soils, particularly soils that are niche to a type of crop ...

That is exactly what the situation is in Colbinabbin. The area is prime agricultural land, with high-quality soil that is particularly suited to grape growing in the Heathcote wine geographical indication. This land must be preserved for its best use in the primary production of grapes and other fruits and crops.

There are many other areas where the solar facility could be located, and Campaspe Shire Council has been active in trying to help the energy developer to find an alternative location for the solar farm where they can connect to the grid without taking top-quality arable land out of production. The council, along with local residents and business owners, are concerned that the solar facility, with 740,000 solar panels that are 8 metres tall, will ruin the beautiful views in the area and harm tourism. Wine growers are also worried that this development would alter the microclimate in the area and affect how the grapes grow and ripen.

### **Inclusive education**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:55): (1186) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for the Labor government to implement and fund comprehensive professional development programs for all teachers in Victoria to receive training in neurodiversity-affirming practice. Neurodiversity-affirming teaching is essential for creating inclusive classrooms that celebrate autistic students, embrace their interests and accept their differences. Current national guidelines from Autism CRC recognise neurodiversity-affirming practice as the best approach for supporting autistic children in mainstream schools. However, Victorian schools are falling behind. They often rely on outdated behavioural interventions that do not align with best practices and contribute to the high rates of bullying and exclusion experienced by up to 97 per cent of autistic students.

Implementing neurodiversity-affirming training for teachers will empower them with the knowledge and skills to facilitate a supportive and thriving environment for neurodiverse students. Numerous case studies have shown that with appropriate professional development and ongoing consultation schools can transform their culture within one to two years at a relatively low cost. This is a proven success story waiting to be replicated here in Victoria. Your Labor pals in South Australia serve as a good example. They already have an office for autism and a dedicated ministerial position. It is frustrating to know that Victorian schools could be doing so much more for neurodiverse students with the appropriate training and resources, and yet here we are. I urge the Minister for Education to prioritise the funding and implementation of neurodiversity-affirming professional development for teachers across Victoria's public schools. Investing in this initiative will ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive in an affirming and inclusive educational environment. We are meant to be the Education State. Let us act like it.

### **Anti-vilification legislation**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:56): (1187) My adjournment is to the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for the Attorney to extend the consultation period on the Labor government's latest proposed anti-vilification laws. The most recent proposed changes to these laws are the most far-reaching changes to Victoria's anti-vilification laws since they were first legislated. The new laws would expand the number of protected attributes that would be protected by criminal offences and civil protections from two to 10. On top of race and religious belief or activity, this would now include disability, gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and then personal association, so a person that might be offended on behalf of the above attributes. This is a fivefold increase in the protected attributes and has the potential to massively infringe on freedom of speech here in Victoria and restrict massively the practice of free worship and of faith in our state.

The current serious vilification offences are objective, meaning they require proof that the person has incited hatred and threatened physical harm or property damage on the grounds of a person's race or religious belief. What we see in this law is a radical expansion of these offences to incite hatred against, serious contempt for, revulsion towards or severe ridicule of another person towards a group or persons on the ground of that protected attribute. The government not only plans to include all of these in there but also has the precursor of 'likely to' incite hatred or 'likely to' cause severe ridicule. The problem with these laws is that they are subjective. If I am going 110 kilometres in a 100 zone, I know I am breaking the law. That is an objective law. Someone may be breaching the law if they are talking to a church group or something. They might be breaching the law and not even know it. Subjective laws are bad laws, and I actually mentioned this in my maiden speech, where I said anti-vilification laws like the ones brought to this place last term should never again see the light of day. Laws on speech with ridiculously low thresholds, like being 'likely to' cause offence, should be consigned to the dustbin of history.

In terms of cancel culture, subjective laws on speech will lead us to a point of no return. As Michael O'Brien has said, these laws affect every single Victorian, what they can say, what they can write, what they can do and even how they can worship. The right to freedom of speech, thought and worship is critical to the rights of all Victorians to not be vilified simply for who they are. Getting the balance right is crucial, and Labor must extend the consultation period to give more Victorians a chance to have their say. The Attorney recently thought she could slip through a change like the Lord's Prayer without communities noticing. I will not let her slip this through without every single multicultural and multifaith community around Victoria knowing what the government is planning on doing.

#### **V/Line services**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:59): (1188) My adjournment matter for tonight is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the return of buffet cars to all regional trains. My constituents have reached out to me with a problem that might seem very trivial to some but that can make a big difference for others. At 6:19 am many of us are still tucked up in our nice warm beds, but some of my constituents are pulling out of the Shepparton station heading towards Melbourne. Some of these people have already travelled for an hour or so to reach the station. On a cold morning many of us enjoy nothing more than a nice warm cup of tea or coffee. This is not a luxury afforded to the travellers on the new VLocity trains. You see, there are no buffet cars anymore, and sometimes it is not feasible to bring hot food and drinks onto the train.

My constituents are not asking for a 5-star restaurant; they are asking for somewhere to get a nice warm cuppa early in the morning and maybe a toasted sandwich or the like. Travellers on the Albury, Swan Hill and Warrnambool lines still have this option on some of their services, but the rest of our regional travellers miss out. The action I seek from the minister, for the comfort of our regional travellers, is to return the buffet cars.

#### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region kindergarten funding**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:01): (1189) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Children here in the chamber with us tonight, and the action that I am seeking is an update on how the delivery of kinders on school sites in 2027 will benefit constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region and especially in Clyde North.

Last week 1700 additional kinder on school site places were announced at 11 locations to be delivered from 2026 onwards, and I am very happy to say that Mirniyan Primary School and the interim-named Clyde Creek north primary school in Clyde North are two of the announced locations. Mirniyan Primary School will open from term 1 next year with capacity for 650 students, and with this announcement with the onsite kindergarten at Mirniyan, we will have at least two kindergarten rooms as well. This is going to make a huge difference obviously for families with the double drop-off but also of course give that extra head start to those children to get the best start possible in that transition



into their prep education. Thanks to this announcement, a kindergarten will be onsite at both of these two new schools from term 1 in 2027, just a year after the primary school.

In 2027 we will be delivering 10 new kinders, helping busy Victorian families to ditch the dreaded double drop-off, and this announcement increases the total number of kinders being delivered in 2026 to 23.

**Wendy Lovell** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** It stands in stark contrast to the policies enacted by those opposite – that is, when they have the time enough not to be fighting each other in court. Some of the many important things that you learn in schools and indeed even in early childhood placements as well are basic skills of numeracy and arithmetic and things like counting to 30, which some members in this chamber seem to have a great deal of a hard time getting to terms with. They do not know how to count. They have too many potential leaders. It is Mr Crewther one day, it is Mr Wells from Rowville the next day – outstanding.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, this is an adjournment debate, where an action item is asked of a minister. That has nothing to do with the opposition.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, I will call the member back to the adjournment matter.

**Michael GALEA:** On the point of order, President, I note that I was actually responding to an interjection by Ms Lovell.

**The PRESIDENT:** Interjections are unruly, and I will call you back to your adjournment matter.

**Michael GALEA:** As I say, there are many important things, such as learning how to count to 30, amongst other things, that you can learn. Perhaps some of my colleagues from the other benches may wish to go back to some of these sites and learn firsthand –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, he is defying your order, and he is now hopping back into the opposition. His job in the adjournment is to request an action by a minister.

**The PRESIDENT:** I fail to understand how the counting bit was hopping into the opposition, but maybe I should pay more attention.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Minister. Yes, being kind to each other is a very important trait that let us say many in this place could learn from. It is a very important thing and a very important measure that this government is invested in, delivering these onsite kindergartens for working families where they need them, including these two new ones in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region on top of the new one that is opening at Topirum Primary School next year – another terrific initiative of this Labor government. The action that I seek of the minister is an update on how these new kinders will benefit families in my electorate.

### Energy costs

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (19:05): (1190) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it concerns the surging cost of energy for Victorians. We already know that the St Vincent's work shows a 28 per cent increase for electricity and a 22 per cent increase for gas in the last year, but also part of the surging cost of energy are various green schemes, and particularly the Victorian energy upgrades program. This pays an amount which is now about \$108.50 for every tonne of carbon dioxide mitigated. But it is unfortunately the most expensive scheme of its type in Australia, likely more than 60 per cent more expensive than the next most expensive scheme, representing a 30 per cent increase over just 12 months and a rise from \$88 million a decade ago and likely to cost more than \$650 million in 2024. So this is a huge impact.

The St Vincent's analysis of the national energy market actually has a very interesting chart. Chart 9 on page 18 of the St Vincent de Paul and Alvis Consulting paper looking at the cost of energy shows

that Victoria is far and away the most expensive for green schemes. \$188 a year is what an average Victorian household pays, and they are looking specifically at households using 6000 kilowatt hours per annum. Queensland customers have the lowest, at around \$90 per annum. We have got the most expensive cross-subsidy, which is paid for by every single household in Victoria. This is of course part of the energy efficiency scheme that Minister D'Ambrosio, who has been there for 10 years, introduced and pushed forward. This is the one that brought us the immortal scenes of fridges outside businesses where not one environmentally sound fridge, or two, but in some cases four, six or eight special fridges were delivered to the property. This is a scheme in chaos.

I note that the minister has indicated that the scheme will be reviewed, but she has also, concurrent with that, announced that the scheme will be extended. I would like the minister to indicate who will do this review. Who will undertake this review? Will it be an independent review? Will the minister consult with the opposition before the review proceeds? I ask the minister to be transparent about how she arrived at the person doing the review, to make sure that the review is independent and to insist that the costs for families are not increased in the way that they have been.

### **Riddells Creek planning**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (19:08): (1191) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I am seeking is for her to use her decision-making power through the development facilitation pathway to reject the development application on Amess Road in Riddells Creek.

The community of Riddells Creek, on the northern outskirts of Melbourne, is facing a major new development. The proposal being prepared by Echelon Planning on behalf of Banner Asset Management would pack 3800 new residents into a site which currently only has one main road feeding into and out of the town. At the 2021 census Riddells Creek was home to a population of 3600, so this proposal would effectively double its population. While development in communities such as Riddells Creek is not only inevitable but perhaps also necessary as we endeavour to increase access to housing in semi-regional communities, large-scale development without adequate infrastructure to support such significant population growth is short-sighted and risks establishing unsustainable communities.

History has shown us that when there is inadequate integration between the interests of developers and the needs of the community in regard to access to public transport, green spaces and places for social connection, this has significantly detrimental effects on the local community. And the responsibility of the state government is to invest beyond the basics. Take high-density developments in my electorate, for example. Growing communities on the outskirts of Greater Geelong remain inadequately supported by public or active transport infrastructure – one only needs to look at Armstrong Creek. This means that at a time when we need to be reducing our reliance on cars – and with haste – the main arterials into town are clogged with commuters, often a single driver in each vehicle, because they have to rely on a car to get to the business centre of Geelong for school, work or play. Yes, we need more homes, but developers cannot get away with turning paddocks into high-density housing and making a mint while providing no community amenities and infrastructure and then moving on. We all thrive when we live in good-quality communities, not just in sprawl with no way in or out except by car.

### **Land tax**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (19:10): (1192) My adjournment debate for the Treasurer concerns the land tax liability of Victoria's power grid. We all know AusNet operate most Victorian transmission lines and so enjoy easements over significant stretches of our state, but the land tax bill they pay for it is shocking. For May 2024 to April 2025 the Treasurer and his friends at the State Revenue Office demanded an incredible \$257 million. This raises a number of questions. The first is the impact of the Treasurer's land tax hikes on Victorian electricity prices. Every time there is a rise, Labor run the line that it is the top end of town who will pay. We already knew this was a pretty shonky

argument, but this SRO bill completely demolishes the lie. The biggest land tax payers are not developers, land bankers, property barons or foreign investment funds. It is every Victorian, every family, every business who pays an electricity bill, because of course AusNet does not wear it. Each year that the land tax assessment exceeds the value predicted, which is every year in Labor's Victoria, AusNet apply to the Australian Energy Regulator for a pass-through, which allows them to transfer the cost from themselves to Victorian bill payers.

I looked back at the history. In 2020 AusNet reported a tax assessment of \$161 million. Just four years later – four years – that had exploded to \$257 million. That is \$96 million more – a 60 per cent increase in just four years without any increase in input costs or materials or labour, just pure tax. If the Treasurer understands the massive whack his land tax grab has added to Victoria's electricity bills, his lack of transparency is shocking. And if he is unaware, his lack of competence is damning.

I have already asked if the rush for extended transmission networks despite credible questions about their necessity resulted from ulterior motives, with the companies involved increasing their regulated asset base and ultimately their gross profits. But now I wonder about the government incentive. Building new transmission lines instead of reusing existing easements generates serious cash for the Treasurer, all without having to announce a tax increase. So I ask the Treasurer for more complete information. What is the state's total annual land tax revenue from transmission line easements and from power generation sites? As more land across the state hosts renewable power generation, this revenue is presumably rising too.

### Mulesing

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (19:13): (1193) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with FOUR PAWS, Humane Society International and the Australian Alliance for Animals to discuss their recently published report titled *The Broken Promise: The Australian Wool Industry's Failure to End Live Lamb Cutting (Mulesing), and Why Governments Must Step In*. Live lamb cutting, also known as mulesing, is a mutilation using shears to cut a chunk of skin and flesh off a lamb's hindquarters, between the ages of 2 and 12 weeks. They are flipped upside down as someone hacks off their skin, leaving them with a huge, raw and bleeding wound. This is often done with zero or inadequate pain relief. Some of you may not be aware and others may be all too aware that the Australian wool industry in 2004 made a commitment to phasing out live lamb cutting by 2010. It is now 14 years later, in 2024, and 52 per cent of wool producers are still performing this mutilation.

The purpose of live lamb cutting is to prevent flystrike, where flies lay eggs in a sheep's skin folds. Yet flystrike is entirely preventable through the breeding of plain-bodied and naturally flystrike-resistant sheep who have low wrinkle and dag scores. In 2020 a BG Economics report revealed that of 97 wool producers surveyed, 83 per cent said transitioning to breed plain-bodied merinos was not costly; 87 per cent received a price premium for wool from sheep not subjected to live lamb cutting; and 86 per cent recommended the transition to other wool producers.

The calls for the end of live lamb cutting are not just from animal welfare advocates but from ordinary consumers and from the industry itself, with the CEO of WoolProducers Australia Jo Hall declaring that 'anyone who tries to claim that mulesing does not cause pain is living in Disneyland', and there are even demands coming from Australia, EU and UK trade negotiations. Many brands are opposed to live lamb cutting, including BIG W, David Jones, Nike, H&M, Hugo Boss, Myer, Patagonia and Target, and as a result they are sourcing their wool from outside of Australia.

Australia is currently the only country in the entire world where live lamb cutting is still legal – how utterly embarrassing for this nation. The industry has failed to live up to its promise. It is now time that the Victorian government steps in to ban it, and I hope that the minister will meet with these organisations to discuss the findings of the report and the steps forward in order to do this.

### **Korus Connect**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:16): (1194) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Education, and I ask the minister for action in advocating for the opportunity and continued financial support of Korus Connect and an increase in finances for this organisation, which has been a significant one in providing special religious instruction (SRI) and school chaplaincy services in Victoria's education landscape for almost 80 years. Korus Connect is facing enormous challenges due to this state government's position on religious instruction in schools. All the organisation is asking for is an assurance that the government will provide additional funding through a fairer funding process to allow for the continued support of Victorian students.

At the last election the Labor government committed to the removal of the Lord's Prayer from parliamentary proceedings, to be replaced with a secular reflection, if it were re-elected. The Liberal-Nationals have fought, with the advocacy of numerous multicultural and faith communities, and been able so far to retain the Lord's Prayer during parliamentary proceedings in this chamber, because we understand the importance faith has for many of our groups in our community. We must embrace and respect all of our faith communities, ensuring their presence is acknowledged. We also have a duty as elected representatives to uphold traditions that honour the faith and diversity of our constituents.

Korus Connect offers a holistic educational response through special religious instruction and chaplaincy which complements our traditional academic curriculum by addressing students' spiritual, emotional and social needs. The approach can lead to improved overall wellbeing and enhanced academic performance by reinforcing positive values such as compassion, integrity and tolerance. The chaplaincy program offers students a safe and confidential space to discuss their concerns, receive guidance and develop coping mechanisms, and I myself have had the privilege of working in this field in schools.

Korus Connect's call for funding would enable it to broaden its scope with enhanced community engagement by involving parents, teachers and community leaders in its initiative. It would also allow the organisation to explore innovative approaches to delivering SRI and chaplaincy services on online platforms for blended learning models and allow for the provision of SRI in schools, which would be very much appreciated for my people in the south-east.

Minister, the impact of supporting Korus Connect would be to help to improve academic achievement, mental health and social wellbeing for our students, who we know have suffered so much with the impacts of COVID and the lockdowns. These programs also foster a sense of community within schools and strengthen connections between the school and the wider community. Korus Connect's work in Victorian education is invaluable; it addresses needs that are incredibly important to the Victorian people.

### **Regional and rural roads**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (19:19): (1195) My matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it relates to the much-touted blitz which the minister has engaged in over the weekend. I am not talking about a roads blitz; it is more akin to a media blitz. \$675 million is not a blitz, especially when it is money that has already been budgeted in the 2024–25 budget and also confined with some flood recovery money. It is not new money. It is not any new program the government has undertaken to ensure our roads are better. This is literally just maintenance money. That is what we are dealing with here. We have got to be clear: it is money designed to maintain roads, not upgrade roads and not for new roads. It is not to improve them, it is just to maintain what we already have. So a media blitz, yes. A roads blitz – it is barely scratching the surface.

The action that I seek is for the minister to actually fight for regional communities to get more roads funding. I am not just talking about maintenance funding, I am talking about upgrades, extensions and of course appropriate maintenance. Every time a person comes to Victoria the first thing that they say is, 'Why are your roads so bad compared to other states like South Australia and New South Wales?'

I will tell you why. It is because for the last 10 years they have been neglected by those opposite. I drive the Western Highway regularly. I know that this blitz is not going to make a fundamental difference to the surface of the road. It might end up fixing some potholes somewhere in some trouble spots. But quite often it is the case that more potholes just appear in other neglected parts of the highway, and usually intervention levels are quite simply set on the lack of government money rather than an actual need to improve the road surface.

Nowhere in the government's press release was there a mention of the Bungaree-Creswick Road or the Ballarat-Carngham Road or the Ballarat-Maryborough Road or the Colac-Ballararat Road or the Beaufort-Lexton Road or the Ararat-St Arnaud Road or the many other arterial roads that the state government is responsible for but has continued to neglect. They all deserve attention. I do not raise this just to say the roads are bad, I raise it because it is people whose lives are impacted. Whether it is their vehicles, cars, trucks, utes – all continually damaged – road safety is an issue that can sometimes be caused by a bad road surface. All these issues impact people, and if you really put people first, you would make sure that roads are a top priority, particularly for country Victorians, who face the challenge every day of dodgy roads.

### **Tobacco licensing scheme**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (19:23): (1196) My adjournment is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs and for the attention of the Premier to again ask the state government to take action and set up a retail licensing scheme for the tobacco industry. So far more than 100 Victorian shops have been firebombed or destroyed, including a tobacco store in Hargreaves Mall, right in the centre of Bendigo, opposite a children's playground. In January this year a car rammed into the store, causing a fire and damage to nearby businesses. Ten months later it should be a bustling, busy shopping area, but these shops remain closed, including the menswear store next door. A parliamentary inquiry and report into the tobacco industry made a key recommendation that every seller be required to hold a licence and face strict reporting rules. The illicit tobacco trade continues to grow, yet the government has failed to take action to introduce legislation to address this issue.

I visited local businesses in Eaglehawk recently. Quite rightly, many residents and business owners are very concerned that a tobacconist and convenience store plans to open in the main street. Local residents are concerned about the safety of their community. Many are asking why the state government is doing nothing to curb this criminal activity. They have gathered together to sign a petition to send to the City of Greater Bendigo, but as these matters relate to a state responsibility it is appropriate to bring it to the attention of the Premier. I raised this issue back in January after the incident occurred in Bendigo, and my Nationals colleague Tim McCurdy, as Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs, has repeatedly raised this issue.

In March the Premier indicated that urgent action would be taken, but we are still waiting for legislation that requires traders to obtain a licence to operate and sell tobacco products. Currently Victoria is lagging behind other states and a licence is not required. Why is the Allan Labor government failing to take action and permitting the chaos and crime to continue? The action I seek is for the state government to focus on crime prevention and introduce laws as soon as possible to close this loophole.

### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:25): (1197) The action I seek is from the Treasurer. The small businesses in my electorate, particularly in Box Hill and Glen Waverley, are facing a growing and urgent crisis. Since the start of Suburban Rail Loop construction local business owners have reported unprecedented declines in their customer base, with some seeing their customer numbers halved. It is not just a temporary inconvenience, it is a severe threat to the livelihoods of families and the viability of these businesses. The SRL construction is significantly impacting accessibility in these areas, deterring customers from visiting their local shops and cafes. The businesses of Box Hill and Glen Waverley, which have long been the central shopping strips, such as Kingsway or Whitehorse Road, are now struggling to keep their doors open. Many of these small

business owners have invested their life savings only to find themselves trapped in an environment where high state taxes coupled with the disruptive impacts of construction are driving them to the wall. When businesses close, the effects ripple through the entire community. Jobs are lost and the spirit of local enterprise fails. We have lost more than 5000 small businesses in the last 12 months. More than 3000 businesses have relocated from Victoria to other states in recent years, seeking relief from the state's high tax burden.

How can the Treasurer justify pouring \$35 billion into the Suburban Rail Loop? How can the Suburban Rail Loop Authority be entitled to a \$250 million slush fund for so-called community grants and yet not provide adequate, appropriate support to local businesses, keeping in mind that behind every one of these businesses are a family, children and a community? This is a requirement and a theme that I intend to return to again and again going forward, especially as my local businesses get no such support from their local members – Paul Hamer in Box Hill and John Mullahy in Glen Waverley. The action I seek from the Treasurer is to urgently deliver targeted, appropriate financial support for businesses in SRL precincts who are grappling with severe customer losses and crippling revenue drops as a result of the relentless construction impacts.

### **Pakenham community hospital**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (19:27): (1198) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Health. I was actually going to invite my government colleagues to play along with a little game, but they have all gone home to bed, I think. But I want to ask: can you guess which one of these events came first? Donald Trump visits North Korea, Boris Johnson becomes the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the release of the first *Joker* movie, the AFL hosts a grand final in Brisbane or Labor promises Pakenham a new hospital? For those of you playing at home, the answer is actually the last one. It has now been 2180 days since Labor promised Pakenham a new hospital. First at the 2018 election – and they said it would be completed by this year, and it absolutely has not – and then Labor promised the same hospital at the 2022 election, and now they say it will be complete by 2026, but we surely cannot trust them. My community is sick of waiting. The site of the long-promised hospital is an absolute disgrace – an empty lot with abandoned shops that the government forced out so they could build this new hospital. They have broken so many dreams, and they have failed to deliver on their promise. One constituent described the site as ‘derelict and Third World’, and sadly, I could not agree more. Minister, my community is sick of waiting, and the action that I seek is for you to answer the question my community is asking: when will we see action on this site?

### **Responses**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (19:29): I would in the first instance like to reply to Mr Galea's adjournment matter to me as Minister for Children, and I thank Mr Galea as a member for South-Eastern Metropolitan for his continued support of the Allan Labor government's early childhood reforms. I have had the pleasure of visiting a number of sites involved in our Best Start, Best Life reforms with Mr Galea as well as with Mr Tarlamis. Last week I had the pleasure of announcing 11 more kinders set to open at government schools in 2026–27, in that case alongside the member for Footscray in the other place. These 11 kinders will create more the 1700 additional places across Victoria. Four of these kinders, as identified by Mr Galea, will be located within the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region and two of them will be in Clyde North. Both these kinders will be located at brand new schools because we are building a kinder on school site to go with every new school. One of them will be located at Mirniyan Primary School and the other at what is currently being called Clyde Creek North primary school. The kinders will consist of at least two kindergarten rooms and will open in 2027.

These kinders are an important part of our \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms, and they are much appreciated everywhere I go by local families who agree that we are greatly improving access to kinder. This was nowhere more true than in Clyde North. This is important because it allows families to ditch the dreaded double drop-off, but more importantly it is also good for child development. As

Mr Galea aptly pointed out, it is in early education in those important years in kindergarten when people learn the basics of reading, writing and counting but also the importance of socialising with each other and the skills that will set them up for life to build lifelong friendships and partnerships and be kind to each other in our world. As we have seen and as Mr Galea rightly pointed out, the ability to count to 30 is particularly important. The ability to count beyond 30 is also very important.

Since 2018 we have helped over 70 kinders at schools and upgraded hundreds more as part of these Best Start, Best Life reforms. These investments into our early childhood infrastructure are also supporting the delivery of the 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten each week by 2029 and the 30 hours of pre-prep each week by 2036. This will benefit families from every corner of Victoria, including Clyde North, and if these reforms had been in place some time ago perhaps those opposite would have benefited as well.

A number of other members have raised matters for a series of other ministers, and I will refer those accordingly. I seek your clarification, as Mrs Broad raised a matter that was for both the Premier and the Minister for Consumer Affairs. I would seek to refer that to the Minister for Consumer Affairs.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think your safest bet might be the Premier, and then it will cover a number of portfolios.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Okay. I am happy to refer that matter to the Premier.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:32 pm.**