

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION**

Wednesday, 9 March 2016

(Extract from book 3)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

HANSARD¹⁵⁰



1866–2016

Following a select committee investigation, Victorian Hansard was conceived when the following amended motion was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 23 June 1865:

That in the opinion of this house, provision should be made to secure a more accurate report of the debates in Parliament, in the form of *Hansard*.

The sessional volume for the first sitting period of the Fifth Parliament, from 12 February to 10 April 1866, contains the following preface dated 11 April:

As a preface to the first volume of “Parliamentary Debates” (new series), it is not inappropriate to state that prior to the Fifth Parliament of Victoria the newspapers of the day virtually supplied the only records of the debates of the Legislature.

With the commencement of the Fifth Parliament, however, an independent report was furnished by a special staff of reporters, and issued in weekly parts.

This volume contains the complete reports of the proceedings of both Houses during the past session.

In 2016 the Hansard Unit of the Department of Parliamentary Services continues the work begun 150 years ago of providing an accurate and complete report of the proceedings of both houses of the Victorian Parliament.

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AM

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

The ministry

Premier	The Hon. D. M. Andrews, MP
Deputy Premier and Minister for Education	The Hon. J. A. Merlino, MP
Treasurer	The Hon. T. H. Pallas, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Employment	The Hon. J. Allan, MP
Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade	The Hon. P. Dalidakis, MLC
Minister for Industry, and Minister for Energy and Resources	The Hon. L. D'Ambrosio, MP
Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and Minister for Ports	The Hon. L. A. Donnellan, MP
Minister for Tourism and Major Events, Minister for Sport and Minister for Veterans	The Hon. J. H. Eren, MP
Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality and Minister for Creative Industries	The Hon. M. P. Foley, MP
Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation	The Hon. J. F. Garrett, MP
Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services	The Hon. J. Hennessy, MP
Minister for Training and Skills	The Hon. S. R. Herbert, MLC
Minister for Local Government, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Industrial Relations	The Hon. N. M. Hutchins, MP
Special Minister of State	The Hon. G. Jennings, MLC
Minister for Families and Children, and Minister for Youth Affairs	The Hon. J. Mikakos, MLC
Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water	The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP
Minister for Police and Minister for Corrections	The Hon. W. M. Noonan, MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Racing	The Hon. M. P. Pakula, MP
Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development	The Hon. J. L. Pulford, MLC
Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence	The Hon. F. Richardson, MP
Minister for Finance and Minister for Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. R. D. Scott, MP
Minister for Planning	The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Ms M. Kairouz, MP

**OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION**

Speaker:

The Hon. TELMO LANGUILLER

Deputy Speaker:

Mr D. A. NARDELLA

Acting Speakers:

Mr Angus, Mr Blackwood, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Carbines, Mr Crisp, Mr Dixon, Ms Edwards, Ms Halfpenny,
Ms Kilkenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr McGuire, Ms McLeish, Mr Pearson, Ms Ryall, Ms Thomas,
Mr Thompson, Ms Thomson, Ms Ward and Mr Watt.

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier:

The Hon. D. M. ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. J. A. MERLINO

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

The Hon. M. J. GUY

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

The Hon. D. J. HODGETT

Leader of The Nationals:

The Hon. P. L. WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Ms S. RYAN

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey

Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A. Young

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McLeish, Ms Lucinda Gaye	Eildon	LP
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	Merlino, Mr James Anthony	Monbulk	ALP
Angus, Mr Neil Andrew Warwick	Forest Hill	LP	Morris, Mr David Charles	Mornington	LP
Asher, Ms Louise	Brighton	LP	Mulder, Mr Terence Wynn ²	Polwarth	LP
Battin, Mr Bradley William	Gembrook	LP	Napthine, Dr Denis Vincent ³	South-West Coast	LP
Blackwood, Mr Gary John	Narracan	LP	Nardella, Mr Donato Antonio	Melton	ALP
Blandthorn, Ms Elizabeth Anne	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Ms Roma ¹	South-West Coast	LP	Noonan, Mr Wade Matthew	Williamstown	ALP
Brooks, Mr Colin William	Bundoora	ALP	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Nats
Bull, Mr Joshua Michael	Sunbury	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ⁴	Gippsland South	Nats
Bull, Mr Timothy Owen	Gippsland East	Nats	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
Burgess, Mr Neale Ronald	Hastings	LP	Pakula, Mr Martin Philip	Keysborough	ALP
Carbines, Mr Anthony Richard	Ivanhoe	ALP	Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh	Werribee	ALP
Carroll, Mr Benjamin Alan	Niddrie	ALP	Paynter, Mr Brian Francis	Bass	LP
Clark, Mr Robert William	Box Hill	LP	Pearson, Mr Daniel James	Essendon	ALP
Couzens, Ms Christine Anne	Geelong	ALP	Perera, Mr Jude	Cranbourne	ALP
Crisp, Mr Peter Laurence	Mildura	Nats	Pesutto, Mr John	Hawthorn	LP
D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Richardson, Mr Timothy Noel	Mordialloc	ALP
Dimopoulos, Mr Stephen	Oakleigh	ALP	Richardson, Ms Fiona Catherine Alison	Northcote	ALP
Dixon, Mr Martin Francis	Nepean	LP	Riordan, Mr Richard ⁵	Polwarth	LP
Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony	Narre Warren North	ALP	Ryall, Ms Deanne Sharon	Ringwood	LP
Edbrooke, Mr Paul Andrew	Frankston	ALP	Ryan, Mr Peter Julian ⁶	Gippsland South	Nats
Edwards, Ms Janice Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Ryan, Ms Stephanie Maureen	Euroa	Nats
Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Sandell, Ms Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Foley, Mr Martin Peter	Albert Park	ALP	Scott, Mr Robin David	Preston	ALP
Fyffe, Mrs Christine Anne	Evelyn	LP	Sheed, Ms Suzanna	Shepparton	Ind
Garrett, Ms Jane Furneaux	Brunswick	ALP	Smith, Mr Ryan	Warrandyte	LP
Gidley, Mr Michael Xavier Charles	Mount Waverley	LP	Smith, Mr Timothy Colin	Kew	LP
Graley, Ms Judith Ann	Narre Warren South	ALP	Southwick, Mr David James	Caulfield	LP
Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Spence, Ms Rosalind Louise	Yuroke	ALP
Guy, Mr Matthew Jason	Bulleen	LP	Staikos, Mr Nicholas	Bentleigh	ALP
Halfpenny, Ms Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Staley, Ms Louise Eileen	Ripon	LP
Hennessy, Ms Jill	Altona	ALP	Suleyman, Ms Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Hibbins, Mr Samuel Peter	Prahran	Greens	Thomas, Ms Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hodgett, Mr David John	Croydon	LP	Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton Ross	Sandringham	LP
Howard, Mr Geoffrey Kemp	Buninyong	ALP	Thomson, Ms Marsha Rose	Footscray	ALP
Hutchins, Ms Natalie Maree Sykes	Sydenham	ALP	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Victoria, Ms Heidi	Bayswater	LP
Katos, Mr Andrew	South Barwon	LP	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne	Lowan	Nats	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Murray Plains	Nats
Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Knight, Ms Sharon Patricia	Wendouree	ALP	Watt, Mr Graham Travis	Burwood	LP
Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon	Tarneit	ALP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Rowville	LP
Lim, Mr Muy Hong	Clarinda	ALP	Williams, Ms Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹Elected 31 October 2015

²Resigned 3 September 2015

³Resigned 3 September 2015

⁴Elected 14 March 2015

⁵Elected 31 October 2015

⁶Resigned 2 February 2015

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP — Labor Party; Greens — The Greens;
Ind — Independent; LP — Liberal Party; Nats — The Nationals.

Legislative Assembly committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Allan, Ms D’Ambrosio, Mr Morris, Ms Neville, Ms Ryan, Ms Sandell, Mr Scott and Mr Wells.

Standing Orders Committee — The Speaker, Ms Allan, Ms Asher, Mr Brooks, Mr Clark, Mr Hibbins, Mr Hodgett, Ms Kairouz, Mr Nardella, Ms Ryan and Ms Sheed.

Joint committees

Accountability and Oversight Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Angus, Mr Gidley, Mr Staikos and Ms Thomson.
(*Council*): Ms Bath, Mr Purcell and Ms Symes.

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Allan, Mr Clark, Mr Merlino, Mr M. O’Brien, Mr Pakula, Ms Richardson and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Dalidakis, Ms Dunn, Mr Jennings and Ms Wooldridge.

Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Nardella and Ms Ryall.
(*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Elasmr and Mr Melhem.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Asher, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Dixon, Mr Northe and Ms Spence.
(*Council*): Ms Patten, Mr Somyurek.

Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Halfpenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr Richardson, Mr Tilley and Ms Ward. (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Mr Young.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Couzens, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Edwards, Ms Kealy, Ms McLeish and Ms Sheed. (*Council*): Mr Finn.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr J. Bull, Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Staikos, Ms Suleyman and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Eideh, Ms Hartland, Ms Lovell, Mr Mulino and Mr Young.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Hibbins, Mr D. O’Brien, Mr Richardson, Ms Thomson and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Ms Symes.

Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Mr Howard, Ms Suleyman, Mr Thompson and Mr Tilley. (*Council*): Mr Eideh and Ms Patten.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Morris, Mr D. O’Brien, Mr Pearson, Mr T. Smith and Ms Ward. (*Council*): Dr Carling-Jenkins, Ms Pennicuik and Ms Shing.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr J. Bull, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Dimopoulos, Ms Kilkenny and Mr Pesutto. (*Council*): Ms Bath and Mr Dalla-Riva.

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Wednesday, 9 March 2016

The SPEAKER (Hon. Telmo Languiller) took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

ELECTORATE OFFICE STAFF

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to make the following statement in relation to the matter of employment of casual electorate officers. In September 2015 the President and I advised parties that in consultation with the Parliament's audit committee we would conduct an internal audit of processes and practices related to the employment of casual electorate officers. This advice followed allegations about certain practices in the lead-up to the 2014 state election. That internal audit has been completed, and a copy of the report will be sent to the leaders or representatives of all parties and Independents today. A copy of the report will also be available in the library.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Firefighter compensation

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that any legislation introduced for the presumptive rights (cancer compensation) of firefighters must be equal to all firefighters.

Volunteers and career firefighters attend the same fires, including vehicle fires, bushfires, Hazmat fires and spills, and structure fires. It is therefore vital that any new legislation introduced does not discriminate against volunteers and their families' rights.

By Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (2553 signatures).

Christmas carols in schools

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents in the South-West Coast electorate draws to the attention of the house that the government has imposed the ban on singing traditional Christmas carols in Victorian government schools.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that the Andrews government reverses this decision and allows students attending government schools to sing traditional Christmas carols.

By Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (452 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Gembrook be considered next day on motion of Mr BATTIN (Gembrook).

LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE**Fuel drive-offs**

Mr HOWARD (Buninyong) presented report, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered that report and appendices be published.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General:

Digital Dashboard: Status Review of ICT Projects and Initiatives — Phase 2 — Ordered to be published

Grants to Non-Government Schools — Ordered to be published

MEMBERS STATEMENTS**Victorian Honour Roll of Women**

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — I rise to pay tribute to two outstanding women who on Monday were inducted into Victoria's Honour Roll for Women: Sherryl Garbutt and Auntie Joan Vickery, AO.

Sherryl Garbutt, a former member of this place, my predecessor in the seat of Bundoora and personal mentor, has had a longstanding commitment to protecting the environment and championing women's rights and social justice. In fact she established the women's honour roll back in 2001. Sherryl served in Parliament from 1989 to 2006, including as a minister in the Bracks government, holding various portfolios including women's affairs, environment and conservation, and community services. Her work in these portfolios resulted, among other things, in the establishment of marine national parks and the box-ironbark national parks, the development of the women's safety strategy and the establishment of the Victorian Children's Council. Sherryl continues her work as a member of Our Watch board, the national agency to prevent violence against women and their children.

Aunty Joan Vickery, AO, is a Bundoora resident and Gunditjmara elder who has devoted her life to achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal people. In 1975 Aunty Joan helped establish the Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative which delivers rehabilitation and outreach services to Aboriginal people impacted by substance abuse. She also established a dedicated Koori diabetes service in Victoria, which paved the way for similar services across Australia. Her work in Aboriginal health, justice and drug rehabilitation has helped to build greater awareness and understanding of the issues Aboriginal communities face. Aunty Joan remains active in advocating for the Aboriginal community through a range of different roles. Congratulations to both women on such distinguished service to our community.

Blackburn level crossing

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — Anger is continuing to grow across Blackburn as residents increasingly become aware of how the community is being short-changed by the Andrews government over the Blackburn rail project. This is yet another project that was funded by the Liberals and is being messed up by Labor. Last month a packed public meeting united to protest against the government's botching of plans for the level crossing removal, modifications at Blackburn station and the shared-usage bike path. Those attending were horrified by a presentation on the harm that could be done to Blackburn's cherished native vegetation if the project's design and implementation are not done carefully and sensitively.

Local residents, environmentalists, cyclists, people with disabilities, students, traders and business groups joined in calling for a wider pedestrian underpass and other improvements at Blackburn station, as well as a better bike path solution and disability access that complies with the government's own requirements. So far appeals to the Minister for Public Transport, the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, Shaun Leane, to fix these problems have fallen on the deaf ears of a government that will not consult and will not listen. As the government's own experts are increasingly pointing out, projects like these need to be treated as being about urban design not just about transport. To quote the government's own Office of the Victorian Government Architect:

Don't ignore the broader costs and benefits of the project and long-term legacy of a once-in-a-generation infrastructure intervention.

...

A greater up-front spend on construction is not poor value for money. It unlocks much greater economic and social opportunities for a community, and enables renewal and development opportunity.

I call on the government to start listening, stop short-changing the community and do the job properly. This will make all the difference between a great outcome and an outcome with problems that the community will have to live with for years to come.

Ron Barassi monument, Guildford

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) — Last week I attended a memorable event in Guildford. The great Ron Barassi was honoured in the town with the unveiling of a statue bust at the John Powell Reserve in Guildford. Ron Barassi is a name known to all, but what is probably not so well known is that Ron grew up in Guildford, attended Guildford Primary School and later the Castlemaine technical school. A legend of the AFL, he played and coached in 17 grand finals and won 10 premierships, 6 as a player and 4 as a coach.

Barassi returned to his roots this week with the Vingt Cinq Club, a group of former footy greats, umpires, cricketers and Olympians who funded the monument to Ron in Guildford. Ron's formative years in Guildford were remembered fondly by the many locals and schoolmates who attended the event, and by Ron himself. Tales of Ron's adventures in Guildford abounded, like the time he tore down Kemp's Bridge Road on his one-handlebar bicycle, hit the brakes too hard and propelled himself through the butcher's shopwindow. Historian and family friend Sandra Major said Barassi was always well liked but never far from mischief. She said:

He once even sat up a tree and pelted the teacher with pine cones. He got the cane for that.

On the day peace was declared in 1945, she said a tearful Barassi cried in the classroom as pupils were given the day off. It was all well and good that the war was over, he declared to his classmates, but it would not bring his father back. These early experiences in Guildford shaped Ron Barassi long before he pulled on the boots. We are proud to call him a local Guildford boy.

Woomelang emergency services complex

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — It was my pleasure to attend the official opening of the State Emergency Service and Country Fire Authority complex at Woomelang. For country centres this is a commonsense approach to emergency services and one that should be used as a blueprint elsewhere. Volunteering is one of

the great strengths of rural living, and I would like to place on the record my thanks to all those volunteers who help keep us safe.

Cricket Victoria Tempy event

Mr CRISP — On a very hot Mallee afternoon Cricket Victoria brought the 2015 World Cup to Tempy. Cricket Victoria has undertaken to run a number of functions in drought-affected municipalities, and by any measure the event at Tempy was a huge success. The junior coaching clinic in the morning attracted well over 100 young cricket enthusiasts with family members looking on. The day continued with a cricket match between Tempy and Ouyen, and in the evening, on a small patch of grass, there was a question-and-answer session ‘on the couch’ about all things cricket. Well done to Cricket Victoria and the community of the Mallee, who rallied behind this great event. In particular I thank Boozer Robertson for organising the event.

Hopetoun community event

Mr CRISP — The Hopetoun community gathered on the shores of Lake Lascelles for a picnic and fingerling release. Well done to those who organised this event, as they hold communities together in tough times.

Koorlong Primary School

Mr CRISP — It was my pleasure to join Koorlong Primary School for National Ride2School Day. Well done to all the staff and parents who made this a fun morning on a very hot day. Riding to school and getting exercise were once a great part of growing up in the country. For various reasons these activities have now been reduced to occurring on special days; however, exercise is vitally important for a healthy childhood.

Dominica Whelan

Mr FOLEY (Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing) — I rise to inform the house of the sad and untimely passing of Federal Court judge Dominica Whelan, who died prematurely but peacefully at the age of 61, with her husband, Tony Bradford, and her daughter, Georgia Rose, by her side. Justice Whelan was a member of the Federal Court for the best part of the last 10 years. Before that she was a commissioner of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and the Fair Work Commission, and before that a senior industrial officer and campaigner at the Australian Council of Trade Unions. She served in a number of industrial organisations before that.

I knew and worked with Her Honour for many, many years in both her trade union capacity and her Australian Council of Trade Unions capacity and in her work at the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. She was a woman of great integrity, she was a woman who was committed always to the interests particularly of women workers and she was a champion of and campaigner for reform, particularly in opportunity and equal pay areas.

Her Honour Judge Whelan will be remembered as a person of outstanding integrity, committed to the issues of justice and, particularly in her last few years on the bench, for her support for justice for Indigenous Australians, having led the court’s work on reconciliation action plans. She will be deeply missed by all.

Paul Creed

Ms VICTORIA (Bayswater) — Today I rise to remember a true local hero. Paul Creed lost his battle with cancer on 9 February after putting up a hard-fought battle. Originally an Englishman, Paul ironically personified the term ‘a great Aussie bloke’ and demonstrated what it is to be a true local community leader. Paul’s love of the Bayswater football and cricket clubs was evident from the amount of time he spent volunteering, especially disseminating multiple emails on a weekly basis, celebrating and keeping our community informed about even the smallest club or player triumphs. His passion, support and emails are already missed.

Paul’s contribution to the clubs spanned 37 years, including being a premiership player and captain as well as president, vice-president, secretary and life member. Paul was the life of the clubs and he contributed 100 per cent to everything he did. His humility and courage inspired us all. He was the instigator of the Bayswater Pink Stumps Day, raising money for the McGrath Foundation. Paul’s personality and quick wit made the event enjoyable every year. He found the strength to attend this year’s event one last time and received two standing ovations. He saw firsthand how much he was loved and found peace just a couple of days later. In his honour, this year we raised over \$15 000, the second largest Pink Stumps Day event nationally.

Paul is survived by his loving wife Ros, son Dale, daughter Adele and their families. Creedy, you will be dearly missed by all, including me. Rest in peace, my dear friend, and thank you for everything you did for the Bayswater district.

G21 Region Opportunities for Work

Mr EREN (Minister for Tourism and Major Events) — I was pleased last Friday to host the Treasurer in my electorate of Lara, where we announced that the Andrews Labor government will commit \$1 million from the Regional Jobs Fund to the G21 Region Opportunities for Work — also known as GROW — project. GROW aims to reduce unemployment in the G21's most disadvantaged areas, which include parts of my electorate, over the next 10 years. Of course there is a lot of work to do, and this particular project will go a long way to making sure that disadvantaged areas are looked after.

This will be a partnership with community groups, business and governments. GROW will focus on job creation through social/local procurement and innovative impact investment approaches, linked with demand-led employment brokerage. GROW will have real on-the-ground benefits and over the first five years aims to have delivered the following benefits: creating up to 500 job outcomes in the G21 region, 10 piloted social procurement and investment projects commenced and 500 businesses and organisations in the G21 region as active participants.

I am proud of the fact that our government takes this issue seriously. Even in opposition we understood the importance of job creation in the Geelong region. That is why in 2013 I was proud to take the lead on setting up the Geelong jobs plan. This was not a silver bullet solution to all of the issues facing Geelong, but it was our commitment and willingness to tackle the issue of job creation head-on. Now in government we are still showing our commitment to job creation. GROW aligns with our government's policy of building stronger regional communities and creating more regional jobs. I would like to thank all of those people involved and wish the project all the best for the future.

Regional rail link

Mr WELLS (Rowville) — This statement condemns the Andrews Labor government and the Minister for Public Transport for their arrogance and deception regarding the previous coalition government's significant public transport achievements. In the last sitting week the Minister for Public Transport arrogantly derided the opposition, alleging complete inaction over four long years. The minister must have a very poor memory. How could she forget? But then again it is something about Labor ministers for public transport.

The facts in relation to the regional rail link project are that the coalition had once again inherited a dog of a project from Labor. Despite the then Labor government spruiking in 2010 that regional rail was fully funded, it was soon to be discovered by the coalition that the project had been massively undercosted and grossly underscoped.

In 2011 the coalition was facing a massive cost blowout on regional rail. The Department of Treasury and Finance advised the then Treasurer that the project budget had increased from a Labor estimate of \$4.3 billion to around \$5.5 billion. Why? The original project had not been properly costed by Labor, trains had not been ordered, signalling had been simply forgotten and not funded, and extra money was needed for land acquisition and construction contingencies. How screwed could another project get under Labor? It was the coalition government that turned around this dog of a project left by Labor into a nationally award-winning project delivering massive cost savings and time savings.

Sunbury Aquatic Centre

Mr J. BULL (Sunbury) — The last two weeks have been outstanding for Sunbury and the Sunbury community. On Monday I joined the Minister for Local Government at the Sunbury Aquatic Centre to announce that the Andrews Labor government has delivered \$2 million for a brand-new warm-water pool. The funding was provided through the Andrews government's \$50 million Interface Growth Fund. This project has been a priority for Hume City Council for a number of years and the 15 by 12-metre pool is being built with a growing community in mind. The facility will be ideal for rehabilitation and is an important addition to the suite of preventive and rehabilitation services provided by the council and local health care.

The warm-water pool will cater for people of all ages, with more than 10 per cent of Sunbury's population being 65 years old or older. Residents with mobility issues will now be able to engage in classes and other programs without the need to leave Sunbury. I want to thank the Minister for Local Government for delivering this funding, Hume City Council for its advocacy and of course the staff and patrons of the aquatic centre.

Sunbury global learning centre

Mr J. BULL — In other great news, Hume City Council also recently announced that it has purchased 46–48 Macedon Street, Sunbury, where it will build the much-needed and brand-new global learning centre. The site will house a state-of-the-art library, rooms and

hi-tech facilities to assist the education of Sunbury residents for many years to come. These announcements are what the community wants, they are what the community deserves and they are what the community expects.

Jenny Wilson and Michelle Wood

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I pay tribute to Jenny Wilson and Michelle Wood, the CEO of Life Education, for coordinating an excellent fundraiser directed towards minimising harm from the ingestion of drugs or excessive consumption of alcohol.

Bernie Goudge

Mr THOMPSON — I pay tribute to Bernie Goudge, who on Saturday, 27 February 2016, celebrated her 105th birthday in the midst of family and friends.

Highett Community Bank

Mr THOMPSON — I pay tribute to the Highett Community Bank, which has done an outstanding job in providing support to multiple groups within the Highett region of Melbourne, including senior citizens groups; neighbourhood community houses; Riding for the Disabled; Cheltenham Cemetery Trust; Sandringham Hospital; every local football, cricket, netball, basketball and baseball club; Girl Guides Victoria; Moorabbin Bowling Club; Highett Bowls Club; St Vincent de Paul, St Agnes Conference; Neighbourhood Watch, Moorabbin region; Moorabbin Area Toy Library; Highett Greek Senior Citizens Club; Family Life; MOIRA Disability Youth Services; Bayside Glen Eira Kingston Local Learning and Employment Network; Youth Connect; Victorian State Emergency Service, Moorabbin unit; St Augustine's Outreach Services; and OzChild.

Sheree Marris and Jarrod Boord

Mr THOMPSON — I pay tribute to Sheree Marris and Jarrod Boord on their production of a DVD entitled *Melbourne Down Under*.

Victoria Invitation program

Mr LIM (Clarinda) — The Andrews Labor government will host more than 250 international delegates over the next two weeks as part of the state's flagship inbound trade mission program connecting Victorian businesses with major markets around the world in a bid to drive export opportunities and attract investment. I congratulate the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Philip Dalidakis, who

launched the Victoria Invitation program (VIP) in Melbourne two days ago. This program will see more than 20 countries participate in the biggest cross-industry inbound program of its kind. The two-week program will focus on Victoria's industry sectors with the greatest potential for export growth, including medical technology and pharmaceuticals, food and fibre, international education, digital technology, professional services and retail.

International delegates will take part in one of 15 specifically tailored programs unique to their industry, with metropolitan and regional Victorian businesses, organisations and individuals showcasing their innovative and expert capabilities in delivering high-quality products and services to the world. The mission comes at an opportune time for Victoria, with export capabilities at a record high. The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show Victoria's economy continues to surge, with goods and services exports totalling more than \$43 billion in 2015 — the highest in at least four years. The VIP forms part of the Labor government's \$12 million four-year inbound trade mission initiative, which has a sharpened focus on bringing key international buyers.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Wimmera Machinery Field Days

Ms KEALY (Lowan) — It was a fabulous three hot days at the Wimmera Machinery Field Days. This is the premier event in western Victoria for our local food producers and a great opportunity to listen to local people's concerns regarding the issues important to them, including the impact of the drought. The message was clear: we need more support for drought-ravaged farmers and communities. How disappointing it was that there were no members of the Labor government present at this major event to explain to our farmers how and why they choose to abandon country Victorians when they are hurting the most!

State Schools Relief program

Ms KEALY — The Andrews Labor government must take action to deliver on its State Schools Relief program as part of the drought relief package. According to the Premier's own website the relief fund is intended to provide families in drought-affected communities with uniforms, shoes and other school items. However, families living in drought-affected communities that send their children to schools in non-drought regions are unable to access these funds.

The Premier must address this issue immediately to support our drought-ravaged farmers.

Wimmera Machinery Field Days

Ms KEALY — Congratulations to the Wimmera Machinery Field Days committee for running yet another fabulous event. The tireless work of the committee, led by David Jochinke, is testament to the value of volunteerism in our rural communities. The hours of work to coordinate, set up and run the event as well as the clean-up following the event is outstanding. Considering the enormous benefits the event brings to the local economy and the wellbeing of our people, the efforts of the committee are to be commended.

Chris Creasey

Ms KEALY — Thank you to Chris Creasey and the crew for the delicious kebabs. It was definitely worth the wait, and it is your shout next time, Creasey.

Drought assistance

Ms KEALY — Last year the Premier announced a \$10 million drought relief fund. Nearly four months later — a couple of minutes ago — we have heard that the government has now finally announced where this money is going to be spent. However, the government is not listening to the local community. This was supposed to be money that was decided on by and for our community, but the government is ignoring that. There is no announcement of funding for the Donald stadium or for the Edenhope pipeline. It is an absolute disgrace.

Maddie Race

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) — I rise today to talk about the story of a local community hero, Maddie Race, who has given so much to our local community over the last few years, in particular the Chelsea Heights Community Centre, where she has been on a mission to educate people about the importance of healthy eating and wellbeing. Even in the face of certain changes to the program she has ensured that it has continued.

Maddie has taken her mission of health and wellbeing to local schools in her community, including St Louis de Montfort's Primary School in Aspendale in the member for Carrum's electorate, and she continues to serve our local community through her work with the Edithvale-Aspendale football and netball club.

Maddie and her family faced significant adversity when their family home burnt down in September 2015 and

they lost everything. We saw over those following months a great sign of community spirit, where her neighbour, Roxanne Gillies, got together with well over 100 community members who came together to rally around Maddie and her family to offer their support. It was hard for Maddie and her family to take that support because normally they are giving and supporting everyone else.

Her latest mission is to offer a health and wellbeing scholarship as a health and wellbeing coach, as she is looking to continue the message of health and wellbeing and to support local families. I hope everyone can get behind this and put in an application to that program.

Gaming licences

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I rise to condemn the former Bracks-Brumby Labor government for its botching of the 10-year gaming licence auction, which is estimated to have cost taxpayers \$3 billion. Last week the High Court ruled that Tatts Group and Tabcorp would have to repay the Victorian government more than \$540 million, which includes interest, after an earlier ruling against the government in 2014 that saw the government having to fork out \$450 million in compensation for terminating the original agreement. That action was triggered as a result of the botching by the Bracks-Brumby Labor government, which was just writing cheques for the gaming giants.

On top of the \$1.1 billion of taxpayer funds wasted in ripping up the east-west link contract and the mishandling of the lease for the port of Melbourne, Victorians could be forgiven for thinking it is *Back to the Future* with Labor's desalination plant, smart meters, the north-south pipeline and so on. I know for many Victorians election 2018 cannot come soon enough!

Oromia Media Network

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — Recently I attended the second Oromia Media Network launch, along with Labor's candidate for the federal seat of Melbourne, Sophie Ismail. The Oromo community is an ethnic group inhabiting Ethiopia, northern Kenya and parts of Somalia. With around 38 million members, they constitute the single largest ethnicity in Ethiopia. The establishment of the Oromia Media Network will play an incredibly important role for the Oromo community. Enabling the community to create their own economic wealth through the establishment of their own economic institutions, coupled with the creation of their own cultural institutions, is vital in relation to tackling

discrimination and disadvantage. It will also have the additional benefit of strengthening the Oromo community here in Australia.

The capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, is surrounded by Oromia, which is one of nine ethnically based regional states in Ethiopia. The Oromo community has suffered years of oppression and deprivation in its home country. Recently the Ethiopian government has sought to expand the capital into Oromia, which has triggered widespread protests. New York-based Human Rights Watch in an article in February of this year said this about the Ethiopian government:

Security forces, including military personnel, have fatally shot scores of demonstrators. Thousands of people have been arrested and remain in detention without charge. While the frequency of protests appears to have decreased in the last few weeks, the crackdown continues.

These events are causing enormous distress in the Oromo community, many of whose members live in my electorate. It is vitally important that a peaceful solution be found, and, if necessary, I would ask that the United Nations become involved to ensure that this happens. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the great work done by Yadata Saba, president of the Australian Oromo Community Association in Victoria.

Monash Chinese Friendship Association

Mr GIDLEY (Mount Waverley) — Today in the Parliament I recognise the Monash Chinese Friendship Association for its continuing work to provide friendship and services to its members. On Tuesday, 16 February, I was fortunate to join with the association to celebrate Chinese New Year. The event, and the lunch which followed, was full of great performances and entertainers. I thank the association for all of the work it put into the event and for the opportunity to join it for the celebrations. I look forward to continuing to support it wherever I can.

Glen Waverley Chinese New Year and Lantern Festival

Mr GIDLEY — I rise in the Parliament today to congratulate the Monash Chinese Events Organising Committee on all of its efforts in organising the Glen Waverley Chinese New Year and Lantern Festival. The festival, held on 21 February, was full of performances, entertainers and very good food stalls. It was a pleasure to be able to join in the celebrations, and I look forward to continuing to support the festival in future years in any way that I can.

Mount Waverley Cricket Club

Mr GIDLEY — Today in the Parliament I recognise the Mount Waverley Cricket Club for successfully delivering another season of cricketing opportunities for residents. In recent years the club has continued to grow its junior, senior and veterans teams and is now one of the largest cricket clubs in the Waverley area. I thank all the parents, volunteers and supporters for their work in delivering such sporting opportunities to local residents in our area and look forward to continuing to support the club in years to come.

Waverley Gymnastics Centre

Mr GIDLEY — I rise in the Parliament today to once again advocate for this state Labor government to provide \$2 million towards the very worthy Waverley Gymnastics Centre redevelopment. This is particularly relevant at this time when recognising International Women's Day. The redevelopment and the positive aspects that it could contribute to both junior and senior sporting opportunities for girls and women in my district are very, very strong.

Mums Supporting Families in Need

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) — I rise to pay tribute to a fantastic local charity, Mums Supporting Families in Need. This charity has grown from a home-based organisation after it saw a massive need in our community. It evolved to the garage and then to a factory. I visited the other day to drop off some pasta sauce, and it never ceases to amaze me how Mums Supporting Families in Need has been able to harness so much good in our community and focus it on where it needs to go. Every time I am there I see someone dropping off a pram, some food, a cot or a baby capsule ready to go to someone that genuinely needs the item. Over 56 agencies now refer to Mums Supporting Families in Need and supply to needy families as far away as Morwell.

Earlier this year the charity won a statewide competition to meet the Premier who, along with the member for Carrum and me, visited the factory where it was busy packing thousands of hampers for Christmas. I was ecstatic to announce \$10 000 in funding for Mums Supporting Families in Need, an organisation which provides much-needed essentials for children and families in and around the Frankston area. Whether it be people facing disadvantage or domestic violence, these mums are here to help. I am delighted that through the Premier's Charitable Fund we have been able to provide almost one year's rent to this

organisation. I would not presume to speak for the Premier of Victoria, but I do not think our conversations about Mums Supporting Families in Need conveyed the scale and scope of its operation, and I think the Premier, who has had a fair bit to do with charities in his time, was massively impressed by what he saw.

In December last year I also became the ambassador for this incredible charity as it created 300 hampers for the needy over Christmas. Donna, Jodie, Melissa and the team: you are incredible and I want you to know just how valued you are in our community, because I know that with how busy you are there is sometimes no time to sit back and receive a heartfelt thank you.

Cardinia Relay for Life

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) — Today I would like to congratulate the committee, volunteers and participants of the fourth Cardinia Relay for Life, which was held at Toomuc Reserve in Pakenham. Over 18 hours more than 900 participants walked for those who have had cancer, those who are currently being treated and those they have lost. The participants smashed their fundraising goal for cancer research, reaching just under \$100 000. A special mention to Bronwyn Mepstead at the helm of the committee and Di Price from Kinders Together for allowing me and my staff to walk with their team. Huge congratulations to 11-year-old Tess Price for fundraising over \$4000 to cut off her long locks of hair to make a wig for someone with alopecia. Tess was given the Spirit of Relay award. Well done, Tess.

Scots on the Swamp

Mr PAYNTER — On Sunday, 6 March, I opened Scots on the Swamp at Harewood Historical Homestead Museum in Koo Wee Rup. It was a terrific day for the community to enjoy Scottish dancing, music and food, with the proceeds for the day donated to the Koo Wee Rup hospital palliative care unit. I would like to thank Cardinia Shire Council's Citizen of the Year, Ron Ingram, for inviting me, and Bruce Thomas and the organising committee on a great community event.

George 'Ian' Davis

Mr PAYNTER — I would also like to acknowledge the recent passing of George Davis, better known as Ian. A member of the Liberal Party since 1973, he was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly in 1992 and served as the member for Essendon until 1996 — the good old days. Ian and Bev lived in Inverloch, where I had the pleasure of meeting

them during my preselection. Ian had a sharp wit and a keen sense of humour, which was equally matched by his warmth and sound advice.

Separation Tree sapling

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) — I rise to inform the house about the planting of a sapling from the Separation Tree in my electorate of Werribee. The original Separation Tree in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens, a 400-year-old river red gum, marked the place where Victoria's citizens gathered to hear the proclamation that Victoria had become a separate colony from New South Wales. The news was cause for great celebration and almost unVictorian happiness.

Sadly, the Separation Tree was severely damaged by repeated acts of vandalism and could not survive. A consolation is that 26 saplings have been successfully propagated from the tree and planted around Victoria, including one in a place of honour in the gardens of our Parliament House. I entrusted one of these saplings for the people of my Werribee electorate late last year to the very capable hands of the Victoria State Rose Garden volunteers. The tree has quickly grown to waist height and was appropriately transferred to the heritage grounds of Werribee Park on 17 February 2016.

We are fortunate in my electorate to have Werribee Park and the Chirnside mansion, which was home to the pioneering Chirnside pastoralists from Scotland. The venue brings considerable tourism to the area and is much loved by my constituents. The planting of the sapling at this venue serves as a reminder of the lineage and significance of the Separation Tree and is a broader reflection of Victoria's great legacy and history.

International Women's Day

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) — This week, on 8 March, we celebrated International Women's Day. I want to thank all of the wonderful women who have inspired me, including the women in this Parliament and going all the way back to my grade 4 teacher, Ms Halliday, at St Ives North primary. She taught me that you do not need to be forceful to be influential and she taught me how powerful encouragement and support can be. I do not know where she is today and I do not think she would have any idea that she was such an inspiration or role model to me. And that is the point: each one of us can be a role model and a mentor without even knowing it.

It is imperative therefore that we make sure women occupy leadership roles and that all around us we build supportive environments to encourage women to take

on those roles. So let us start with this place. When I look at the seats opposite it is very clear to me that there are not enough women on them. Yesterday in question time the Leader of the Opposition made a number of comments which have no place in this house and which are incompatible with our commitment to build an equality environment. I want equal rights for women and equal opportunities for women and I want to work in an environment which supports women. If that makes me a feminist, I make no apologies for it. I think we should all be feminists.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2015–16

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) — I refer to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) inquiry into the budget estimates for 2015–16, particularly in relation to the contribution by the Minister for Health, who referred to the Andrews government's investment in the budget in health in growth areas, including Melbourne's north. This goes to a critical proposition that I want to place on record about Australia's need for a new era of enlightenment in the way that we do business between state and federal governments. We must have a paradigm change, placing the public interest ahead of the continuing triumph of politics over rational decision-making, and nowhere is this more significant and more critical than in health.

We have had the situation where new federal government cuts of \$73 million have hit Victorian hospitals and patients this month. These cuts are in addition to the Abbott-Turnbull federal governments' cuts of \$17.7 billion to Victorian hospitals during the next 10 years. That is \$17.7 billion in cuts to health services and hospitals. The cumulative nature of historic neglect and political bias is then compounded by the increasing demands of population growth. Nowhere is this combination more pronounced than in Melbourne's north where more than 50 babies are born weekly in the City of Hume, with the consequent flow-on demand for increased child care, healthcare services and hospitals. Australia must have a needs-based strategy.

The health minister told PAEC how the Andrews government provided extra funding for the Northern Hospital as part of an additional \$200 million Hospital Beds Rescue Fund. But we now have these classic, sneaky tactics of a federal government in the countdown to an election that have cost Victorians \$73 million.

Just so we put this in perspective, this could be used to treat 72 000 chemotherapy patients, attend to 180 000 emergency department presentations or provide almost 12 000 elective surgeries. It is an echo of failed tactics from the past.

I remember a former Victorian Liberal government building the hospital at Essendon decades ago, when it was a marginal seat. It was built only about 15 minutes from the inner ring of major teaching hospitals instead of being built in Broadmeadows. That is where it should have been built. It was obvious. The demand was there; there was population growth. Here was an area that was one of the economic engine rooms. That is where it should have been built. When it opened it was dubbed the *Yes, Minister* hospital because it was a classic. There were no patients, and all the equipment was wrapped in plastic. This was another folly of the past, and that is the way we continue. We saw it echoed again all these decades later. Governments try to hang on and make decisions that are based not in the public interest and not in the best interests of health or the wellbeing of the community but just to try to hang on to a marginal seat — and of course they lost. There is the kicker.

We need a coordinated, collaborative strategy, and I look forward to working with the Victorian Minister for Health on delivering such a result from a state perspective, but we need to actually be able to get this happening at a national level between the governments as well. We need better state and federal relations to actually address the systemic issues that we face. It is also critical in mental health planning and delivery because of the increased bed capacity. We need that at the Broadmeadows Dianella healthcare centre. I visited last week to have a look there. It is the classic again. Capacity is insufficient to keep pace with significant population growth, experienced and forecast, and also the facilities are inadequate to address increasingly complex and high-risk presentations.

Here is the folly. We have enlightened Labor governments actually building these propositions. We get things done in the way that we are addressing the major issues. We need to be a big-picture government. Then Liberal governments come in, and they do things like just making cuts everywhere. They know the cost of everything but the value of little. That is the proposition, even right down to lifelong learning and the Hume Global Learning Village with the idea's lab. We brought Silicon Valley to Broadmeadows. They cut the money for it. Why would you do such a thing? This is the constant battle that we have — one for actually investing in the future that will deliver jobs, growth and

prosperity or just simply cutting and underestimating or not realising value.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:
budget estimates 2015–16**

Ms STALEY (Ripon) — Today I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report into budget estimates 2015–16. Today I will specifically refer to the transcript from the appearance of the Minister for Education on 12 May 2015 before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the published answers to questions on notice that came out of that. I would like to start with a question that Dr Carling-Jenkins, a member in the Legislative Council, asked the minister. She asked:

If a school wished to implement this program —

that was a program called RULER —

or a program similar to this which matches or exceeds the outcome measures of the Safe Schools program, would you —

the minister —

redirect funding to such a program? If not, can you explain why the Safe Schools Coalition was chosen as a priority to fund?

That was taken fundamentally as a question on notice. In the answers provided somewhat later, the summary answer was no. It was basically, ‘We’re going to have Safe Schools’, and that was it.

I think when we start to talk about the Safe Schools program and other alternatives it is important to note that bullying is unacceptable, and bullying in schools demonstrably causes great harm, including school dropouts, self-harm and suicide. It is incumbent upon government as the provider of state schools to keep their students safe, and I applaud efforts to do so. Of course those efforts to reduce bullying need to be across the board, and that includes LGBTI kids, obese kids, kids from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, disabled kids and kids who are merely different. Any of these programs should be evidence based.

So let us have a look at the Safe Schools program and who the authors of that are. The lead author is Margot Fink. I went to Ms Fink’s website, and in her ‘About’ section she describes herself as:

... an activist and designer based in Melbourne ... I work in visual communication and design, video production and diverse range of visual media.

Mr T. Smith — Does she have a teaching degree?

Ms STALEY — She does not suggest she has a teaching degree. The co-author is Marxist advocate Roz Ward. Neither of these authors has expertise in education, children’s development or child psychiatry. Neither of them in fact has any demonstrated expertise in creating a program for children on any subject — any subject. So where is the evidence base for this program that is now being rolled out across all schools in Victoria?

There has been quite a bit of conversation about this recently, so who opposes this program? Greg Donnelly, a Labor Party member of the New South Wales Legislative Council, has accused Safe Schools of ‘gender bending’ in the classroom. He also said:

Their parents, of course, are being kept in the dark.

Of course that is the thing that many of the opponents are saying, that parents need some rights here, but the education minister shuts down all debate. Anybody who questions this is accused of causing great pain. In fact he has said they are ‘giving no consideration to the pain and suffering’. Well, sorry; you cannot just shut down debate because you are an angry male of below-average height who feels it is necessary to act out in an attempt to gain respect and recognition from others to compensate for your abnormally short stature. Of course he has got form on this. When people questioned his outrageous remarks about the Christmas carols, of course he went straight to the United Patriots Front. Apparently we are all part of Rise Up Australia if we dare question his argument. This is not how you have a serious debate about serious education issues in this state. It is really below contempt that Victorians have to put up with this education minister, a person playing out his own inadequacies by bullying those of all contrary opinions, and it should stop.

**Law Reform, Road and Community Safety
Committee: fuel drive-offs**

Mr HOWARD (Buninyong) — I was pleased this morning to have presented before this house the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee’s first report on fuel drive-offs as they occur in Victorian fuel retail outlets. At the outset I commend the members of my committee for the work that they did over the last seven months in preparing this report, and I also commend the committee secretariat staff: Yuki Simmonds, who was our executive officer until October last year; Andrew Homer, who then took on the role after that; John Aliferis, our research officer; and Christianne Andonovski and Sarah Terry, who took on roles as administrative officers before and after September last year. Before I miss the opportunity, I

want to make sure I recognise the work of those people in assisting with the work of our report.

The terms of reference of the inquiry are quite long and detailed, so I do not want to go through them right here, but of course they raise the issue of concerns about fuel drive-offs as they occur at fuel retail outlets at Victorian petrol stations as we know them. We were asked to look at the number of incidents that were occurring, to meet with industry representatives and of course with police and other bodies that had interest in this issue, to look at examples of best practice as they occur in both Victoria and other jurisdictions, and to make recommendations which would help to address this issue, which is clearly a matter of great concern to many fuel retail outlet operators, who get frustrated because people come to their outlets, fill up with petrol and simply drive off.

One of the things our committee found was that it is difficult to determine whether those drive-offs are always intentional or whether they are unintentional. Of course we know of examples that we may have been party to ourselves when we have filled up with fuel and either driven off without paying because we have just been thinking of other things at the time or perhaps we have not necessarily driven off but the opportunity was there and then we remembered to pay before we did drive off. This is something that I am sure does not happen very often amongst members of this house, but we are all human and we know that humanness can happen at times. That was one of the issues that was a challenge to the committee, because when you are dealing with fuel drive-offs and whether the police can take action, you have to consider whether it is a criminal act or whether it is not a criminal act and unintentional. These were issues that we had to consider in our report.

In terms of recommendations that the committee makes, we recommend essentially that there needs to be a partnership between the industry and police in working to address this matter. There is a range of further recommendations we have put forward: establishing an education campaign; establishing six-monthly forums between the police, the industry and other relevant operators to work through ways of better dealing with this problem; and looking at the opportunity of perhaps doing as they have done in Britain with the British Oil Security Syndicate, which is effectively the peak body of fuel operators that follows up on issues of non-payment and is in a position to address that issue.

There is a range of issues that we recommend in the report, including the police developing an online report

system to ensure that where there are issues of drive-offs operators can report those quickly online to police. Where there are repeat offences police would be in a position to follow up, because there is more likelihood where they are repeat offences that there is a criminal intent associated with them.

I trust that both the ministers relevant to this inquiry will look at this report in the months to come and report back as to how they can support the work of our committee in following up on this issue and therefore support the industry, and I trust that the industry and the police can work well together over the coming months and years to establish better practices for addressing this challenge, which is clearly a source of great concern in terms of revenue loss to fuel operators.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2015–16

Mr D. O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) — Thank you, Acting Speaker Pearson, and it is a pleasure to speak on one of your own reports, the report on the 2015–16 budget estimates, which goes into great detail about the government's first budget. It highlights a number of areas of concern for me in my electorate in Gippsland South that I have been working on since being elected but that I am also keen to see in the 2016–17 budget, which of course is coming up very soon.

The report goes into roads, and we highlight the fact that this government cut the roads maintenance budget by 10 per cent, and in addition to that axed the successful country roads and bridges program, which delivered \$1 million every year to the 40 rural and regional councils that they could use to spend on local roads and bridges. It was an excellent program, and it was disappointing to see it being axed by this government.

Looking forward though, there are a number of projects in the Gippsland South electorate that do need attention in this budget. One of those is the Princes Highway east duplication between Traralgon and Sale, which is a project that has been continuing apace under state and federal governments of both persuasions. For about five years now we have been duplicating that road, creating a safer environment and improving economic efficiency in the movement of freight in our area. The final two stretches, which make up about 20 per cent of the distance between Traralgon and Sale, have not yet been funded.

Historically, this project has been funded 80 per cent by the commonwealth and 20 per cent by the state. It is about \$160 million all up, according to VicRoads,

which means we need a state contribution of \$32 million. I hope that the minister has put in a request to the federal government for its share. I know my federal colleague the member for Gippsland, who is now the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, will be taking a very keen interest in this particular project, and I am confident he has it high on his list of priorities.

In addition there is the Black Spur project — the realignment of the Black Spur section of the South Gippsland Highway between Koonwarra and Meeniyan. This is an important project that has been on the table for a long time. Both the state and federal governments funded the business case for this project in 2014. It has taken an inordinate amount of time for the business case for this project to be developed. I suspect that the minister has in fact asked VicRoads to give it a go slowly so that he does not have to consider it this year, but it has been publicly announced that it is a \$51 million project. So it is a big chunk of money, but it is a very important project for safety and for transport efficiency in South Gippsland and for roads generally.

In this year's budget we do need to see a bigger increase in the roads budget and the roads maintenance budget. We have seen some good work over summer that is still continuing in my electorate, but there is a lot more to be done. This government needs to commit more funds to country roads. It will be able to do that, as we now know, through the port lease arrangements. The Liberals and The Nationals have pushed hard for some of the funds from the port lease to be returned to country Victoria. At least 10 per cent of the proceeds will go back to country Victoria, so there will be no excuses for the government not to fund these important roads and transport upgrades that need to occur.

On the issue of schools, we are waiting for funding for a rebuild of the Yarram Primary School. It is locked and loaded; it is basically ready to go. The design and development work is just about complete, but it will certainly be complete by the time the budget comes around. We just need the minister to fund it. The second stage of the Korumburra Secondary College is critically important. The first stage was funded by the previous government, and about \$5 million or \$6 million is required to complete the second stage, which is a really important one. Likewise Leongatha Secondary College needs around about \$1 million to finalise its redevelopment.

Finally, there is the northern towns project. It is a critical one, and one the minister has been alluding to in the last couple of days with respect to the desalination plant. This project would connect the towns of Korumburra, Nyora, Loch and Poowong to the Lance

Creek Reservoir and thereby to the Melbourne system if need be. I emphasise here that the project does not require that the desalination plant be turned on. The towns are connected to Lance Creek, which is an existing reservoir. Yes, that does then connect to the desalination plant, but the northern towns project does not require the desalination plant to be turned on. The last business case that we saw was \$21 million for the project. It is a critically important project for those towns, and in particular for Burra Foods, a major employer and driver of wealth in Korumburra and the south-west Gippsland area. The government does need to fund this project. It is a really important one, and I look forward to seeing it in the budget come May.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2015–16

Ms WARD (Eltham) — I also rise to speak on Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) budget estimates issues and PAEC reports, with particular reference to the Safe Schools Coalition. As a mother of a 13-year-old who attends one of the 10 Victorian foundation schools, I am sure my companions here are interested in my firsthand experience, which is only positive. My experience is that I support this program, and I support my school, as does the principal of Eltham High School, Vincent Sicari. I will read to the Assembly his recent email to me:

... in light of the political banter that has taken place over the last few weeks in relation to the future of the funding of the Safe Schools Coalition initiative. As the principal of one of the 10 foundation schools in Victoria that worked in support of the establishment of the Safe Schools Coalition, I feel that I need to speak into this discourse, and in doing so I ask you for your support in petitioning our federal government to ensure that recurrent funding is provided to this very worthwhile organisation.

In line with our school values, and in particular with the school value of 'respect for diversity', we at Eltham High School believe that every person has the right to be themselves without prejudice or fear. Aligned with this, we believe that schools have to be a safe place for every young person, irrespective of their beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic position, health, ability/disability et cetera — no exceptions.

The work of the Safe Schools Coalition has aligned closely with the core purpose of schooling, and that is to educate young people to understand this fundamental human right of feeling safe to be who you are. Whilst it is always good to debate controversial topics or positions, I feel that what is coming out from our senior political leaders is a banter that clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding of both the philosophy and the work of the Safe Schools Coalition. This is also a clear demonstration of what we often as a nation do best — stick our heads in the sand.

The world is progressively changing and we need to respond and adapt to the changes, and I see it as the role of senior political leaders to provide the support to ensure that the change takes place with the fewest number of casualties as possible.

We are living in a new paradigm, one where everyone is or should be valued for who they are. Within this paradigm there are many voices, some loud and some not so loud, including the voice of same-sex-attracted, intersex and gender-diverse students, staff and families. Our laws encourage these voices to speak out and be heard, and the Safe Schools Coalition has a very clear and definite role in supporting this to happen.

Many students, their families and broader school communities have benefitted to date from the support and work of the Safe Schools Coalition. I strongly believe in the value of the work of this organisation, and furthermore I see how valuable it is in saving lives.

As I see it, the current discussions are not about the value or otherwise of the Safe Schools Coalition; any grounded, forward-thinking person with a good understanding of the world around us would certainly be able to see how important this work is. Its aim is not to indoctrinate or convert but to develop a genuine sense and understanding of the value of diversity and how this can be respected.

Every person has the right to their own opinion but every public representative, such as our senior political leaders, have a responsibility to put aside their own personal views and listen to the views of the people they represent in a fair, balanced and consistent way. They have the responsibility to interrogate research and data and to listen to all the voices, the loud and the not so loud. As I see it, this is not happening in relation to the work of the Safe Schools Coalition, and our senior figures are definitely not gaining understanding of the value of this organisation.

In my view, they are listening to the voices of some, perhaps the loudest voices, and are planning action on the limitation of these voices at the expense of the lives of our most vulnerable young people.

In terms of Eltham High School, the Safe Schools Coalition has supported us through professional development to develop an inclusive curriculum. Furthermore it has supported us to measure the temperature of the school climate on an ongoing basis in relation to our alignment with the school value of 'respect for diversity' and to continuously work to improve. It has also supported groups of students and individuals in coming to terms with their identity and accepting who they are in order to create their own voice within our learning environment and local community and it has also supported families to do the same.

If the Safe Schools Coalition only achieved one of the above roles then I would say that their existence has been of great value; in achieving all of the above roles I can only say that this is an invaluable resource for young people, families and educators and it must be supported ... to do its work in our continuously changing world.

From my observations, the Safe Schools Coalition has never worked from a perspective of indoctrination or conversion, which they are accused of doing. What it has been trying to do, in my view, is to educate all young people to understand that everyone has a right to live their lives based on who we

are and that diversity brings a great richness to our society that should be nurtured and not scorned. Furthermore it continues to work hard on building self-esteem in vulnerable young people ...

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2015–16

Mr T. SMITH (Kew) — I too rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget estimates 2015–16 hearings, particularly the evidence by the Minister for Education, and indeed, his response on notice to the question by Dr Carling-Jenkins from the other place regarding the Safe Schools Coalition. I note the comments made by the member for Eltham, who is a friend of mine and with whom I serve on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. But in this case I humbly and profoundly disagree with her, although at the same time I agree with the point that she was attempting to make, which is, 'Yes, it should be your choice as a parent and indeed your school's choice if your school is going to embark upon the Safe Schools Coalition curriculum'. The position of the coalition in this state is very clear. We think this should be the choice of parents and of teachers and of school communities, not dictates from the government.

Now the other night this government, the Andrews government, was all over the place with regard to whether or not the Safe Schools Coalition curriculum should be compulsory. At about 5.30 p.m. there was a piece online in the *Age* that said it would no longer be compulsory in Victorian state schools. By 8.30 p.m. there was a clarification put out by the minister's spokesman to suggest that that was no longer the case. I can only imagine that there is a great degree of divergent opinions within this government on the compulsory nature of this program.

We on this side of the house absolutely abhor bullying and say that the state government, of course, should have programs in state schools that aim to stamp out bullying for a whole variety of reasons, including issues relating to the LGBTI community. But to suggest that this should be compulsory for all schools, everywhere, all the time, no matter what, smacks of an arrogance that says, 'We know better than you'. We stand for choice in education; that is the whole point of what we are saying. We also support the Turnbull government's review. It is public money and of course it should be reviewed, and it is a highly controversial program by its very nature. The Premier admitted this in this house some weeks ago — that it pushes the boundaries. The boundaries that those on that side of the house think are acceptable to push, a lot of the people that we represent across the community find rather troubling, and that is what it is to live in a democracy where people can

express their views on the way that public money is spent, particularly with the way that their children are being educated and not be labelled homophobes and bigots.

Mr Pearson interjected.

Mr T. SMITH — I will continue to advocate on behalf of my constituents all day, every day, who have grave concerns about this curriculum; a curriculum written by a Marxist. Ms Roz Ward told the Marxism 2015 conference that capitalists have imposed cultural and moral norms around sex, marriage and the natural family that inhibit sexual freedom and that the Safe Schools program was a way of tackling these norms. This woman, to coin a phrase, is a Trot; she is a Marxist. She is the like I used to face on campus, dealing with the sort of people who make no sense, and the government is letting them run this important aspect of our curriculum that is trying to stamp out bullying in our schools.

I am not sure that I have to lecture those opposite on being tolerant of people with a different view on the way public money should be spent, particularly in our schools. But I would remind some of them about what Herbert Marcuse said about repressive tolerance at the height of the Cold War:

Liberating tolerance, then, would mean intolerance against movements from the right and toleration of movements from the left.

This is what those opposite are trying to do at the moment by labelling some of us on this side of the house who have a genuine issue with this quite extreme program in certain circumstances as either homophobes or bigots. I find that personally offensive, and I think it is an absolute indictment of the shallow intellectual standards of the excuse for a Minister for Education. That little bloke over there — that minister — to get up, jump up and down as he has done, and label us homophobes or bigots for having a genuine concern about what is being taught to the next generation of Victorians I think is an utter disgrace.

For the Premier of Victoria to get up in this place and call us homophobes and bigots for having genuine concerns about this program is the sort of left-wing nonsense that Victorians are sick of from this government, and for the alternative Prime Minister to say this in the halls of the federal Parliament is equally disgraceful. Members opposite are better than this and they ought to amend their position immediately.

CONFISCATION AND OTHER MATTERS AMENDMENT BILL 2016

Statement of compatibility

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Confiscation and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2016.

In my opinion, the Confiscation and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2016, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The bill contains a number of amendments to various pieces of legislation. Many of these amendments are technical amendments intended to clarify, rather than alter, the operation of the law. Certain amendments of the Confiscation Act 1997, the Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012 and the Surveillance Devices Act 1999 do raise charter issues. These are discussed further below.

Amendments to the Confiscation Act 1997

The bill contains numerous amendments to the Confiscation Act. The majority of these are technical amendments which are not intended to alter the operation of the act, but to ensure the act operates as intended.

Property rights — section 20

Section 20 of the charter provides ‘a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law’.

The bill contains amendments to make clear that if a person purchases property with funds obtained with a loan, then repays that loan with the proceeds of crime, that that property can still be considered to have been derived from the proceeds of crime and not to have been lawfully acquired for the purposes of the act. This amendment is being made in response to a decision of the Western Australian Supreme Court which held that property purchased in such circumstances could be considered ‘lawfully acquired’ for the purposes of the commonwealth Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

The commonwealth Proceeds of Crime Act is substantially different from the Victorian Confiscation Act. There are provisions already in the Victorian act which provide that property purchased in these circumstances would most likely not be considered lawfully acquired for the purposes of the Victorian act. This amendment is being made to put this question beyond doubt. On this basis the amendment is not likely to raise section 20 charter issues, as it makes no substantive change to the law. If it is considered to engage section 20 property rights, section 20 will not be limited, as any deprivation of property will be clearly set out in the legislation, and is therefore in accordance with the law.

The amendments aimed at making more robust the various asset confiscations schemes found in the act (for instance, the forfeiture and restraining orders, freezing orders, child pornography disposal orders and the proposed changes to definitions of lawfully acquired property and derived property) will engage section 20 of the charter. The very purpose of these confiscation schemes is to deprive persons of property, where that property was unlawfully acquired, or used in the commission of a serious offence. In doing so the schemes play a remedial and preventative role — by deterring persons from involvement in serious and organised crime, and returning the proceeds of such crime to the state.

The amendment to simplify the process for the disposal of child pornography can also be balanced against the protection of children under section 17 of the charter.

The Confiscation Act does not permit the deprivation of property otherwise than in accordance with law, and none of these amendments alter that position. The amendments do not affect any of the safeguards contained in the act. Property will only be subject to restraint and forfeiture by court order. Persons will still be able to seek exclusion of property from forfeiture by explaining how it was lawfully acquired. I therefore do not consider that a person's property rights are limited by the amendments, as any deprivation of property will be in accordance with the law.

Privacy rights — section 13 and the privilege against self-incrimination — section 25(2)(k)

Section 13 of the charter, which deals with the right to privacy, states that a person has the right 'not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with'.

The bill will amend the definition of 'account' (meaning bank or credit card account) to include accounts that have been closed. This amendment is relevant to the existing power in the act that allows Victoria Police to issue a notice to a financial institution that requires the provision of certain information about that account.

The exercise of the information notice power will allow Victoria Police access to limited information about a person's bank accounts. If the information notice specifies a person's name, the notice will require the bank to disclose the account number and balance. If the notice specifies an account number, it will require the bank to disclose the account number and the name in which it is held.

This limited disclosure will amount to an interference with a person's right to privacy. However, it will not be an arbitrary or unlawful interference. The legislation will clearly prescribe the circumstances in which an information notice can be issued, which is when a police officer reasonably believes that the person to whom the notice relates is involved in the commission of serious criminal offences or has benefited from such offences, and that the issuing of the notice is necessary to determine whether to take action under the Confiscation Act.

There are no means to allow Victoria Police access to this information that would be less restrictive of the right to privacy. As noted above, the information notice power exposes very little information about a person's account.

The bill also provides a new purpose for which the 'document request' power can be exercised by a 'prescribed person'

(currently certain officers of the Department of Justice and Regulation are prescribed for this purpose). This power is a power to compel the production of relevant documents from a person. The bill will enable a prescribed person to require the production of documents from a person if the production of those documents is necessary to enforce a pecuniary penalty order. A pecuniary penalty order is an order made against a person convicted of an offence which requires that person to pay to the state a sum of money equivalent to the benefit he or she gained from that offence.

The expansion of this power is necessary because many people refuse to pay pecuniary penalty orders on the basis that they have no capacity to pay. Requiring the production of documents that would establish whether this is true or not will assist those responsible for enforcing pecuniary penalty orders in this enforcement.

This power will engage the right to privacy where the documents produced contain personal information. However it is a very limited interference. The power can only be exercised if a pecuniary penalty order has been made, and only where it is necessary to enforce the order. It will therefore not be arbitrary. It will be lawful because it will be clearly set out in the legislation. I believe any interference with the right to privacy must also be balanced against the need to ensure the effective compliance with the pecuniary penalty order scheme.

This amendment may also engage the right in section 25(2)(k) of the charter, which provides that a person not be compelled to testify against himself or herself or to confess guilt. The amendment may in some circumstances require a person to produce documents that lead to the imposition of a penalty. I note however that this is a lesser interference as the amendment will only require the production of existing documents and will not require a person to submit to oral questioning. I believe any limitation of this right is justified by the need to ensure compliance with the pecuniary penalty order scheme.

Amendments to the Surveillance Devices Act 1999

The bill will amend the Surveillance Devices Act to allow certain officers of the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) to apply for warrants under that act. Such a warrant permits the installation and use of surveillance devices for the purposes of investigating a criminal offence.

This bill will add a reference to DEDJTR into the act, and replace references to the former Department of Primary Industries (DEPI) with references to the Department of Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). Officers of DELWP continue to need access to these powers in order to investigate forestry offences. The amendment in this bill will reflect recent machinery of government changes and do no more than restore access to powers under the act to fisheries officers who very recently were able to exercise those powers.

Privacy rights — section 13

It might be considered that this amendment interferes with the right to privacy contained in section 13 of the charter. Any interference with a person's privacy rights will not, however, be unlawful or arbitrary. The amendment will be clearly set out in the legislation and surveillance warrants will only be sought for the purposes of gathering evidence and

information of people committing alleged fisheries offences, as was the case up until recently. I consider any interference with a person's privacy rights is reasonably necessary to ensure that officers of DEDJTR and DELWP continue to be able to investigate environmental crime. Illegal fishing can have serious consequences for the sustainability of Victoria's fisheries.

This amendment will affect none of the safeguards contained in the Surveillance Devices Act designed to limit the effect on a person's right to privacy of authorised surveillance devices. The use of surveillance devices can only be authorised by court order, and strict controls are placed on the use and storage of material obtained from such devices. Agencies who use devices must have their records and documents inspected by the Victorian Inspectorate. This protection will be extended to DEDJTR by these amendments.

The bill also includes an amendment to allow the relevant minister to redact sensitive information from reports provided by law enforcement agencies before those reports are tabled in Parliament. The act currently requires Victoria Police to include in these reports information that may prejudice the safety of Victoria Police members; it does not include an explicit power to remove the information before tabling.

This amendment protects the safety and promotes the rights of Victoria Police members and other law enforcement officers whose personal details may otherwise be exposed in these reports, including the right to privacy (section 13).

Amendments to the Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012

The amendments to the Criminal Organisations Act 2012 to consolidate the two types of declarations applicable to organisations — prohibitive and restrictive — raise human rights considerations under the charter.

The amendments will reduce the standard of proof required for a declaration which can then be used as the basis for a control order containing a condition preventing the organisation from continuing to operate, carrying on business, or taking on new members. Conditions of this kind engage charter rights, including freedom of expression in section 15, the freedom of association in section 16(2), property rights under section 20, privacy rights under section 13 and the protection of families and children under section 17.

Currently, such a condition can only be imposed on a control order made following a 'prohibitive' declaration, which requires certain matters about the organisation's links to criminality to be proved beyond a reasonable doubt. Under these amendments, such a condition could be imposed following a declaration obtained by proof of those matters to the civil standard.

I do not consider that these amendments limit charter rights for the following reasons.

First, the criminal standard of proof is the highest standard of proof known to law. It generally applies where an accused is facing the prospect of punishment. However, the making of a declaration under the COCA has no immediate consequences in terms of criminal liability for an organisation. An application for a declaration is a civil proceeding. Criminal liability depends upon a control order being made, and upon it being proved to the criminal standard, in subsequent criminal proceedings, that the control order was breached.

Secondly, safeguards will continue to apply when the Supreme Court is considering whether to make a control order. At that stage, the court will need to be satisfied that it is necessary or desirable to restrict the activities of the organisation or its members to end, prevent or reduce a serious threat to public safety or order.

Thirdly, the civil standard of proof will maintain a sufficient safeguard in applications for declarations. It will ensure that declarations are only made on proper grounds. Under section 19(4) of the COCA, the Supreme Court will only decide that it is satisfied of the relevant facts if satisfied by 'acceptable, cogent evidence that is of sufficient weight to justify the making of the declaration'.

Finally, if these amendments do limit charter rights, I consider that any limit is justifiable. The purpose of the amendments is to assist in ensuring that the act can be used effectively to prevent and disrupt the operations of organisations involved in serious criminal activity. The amendments will ensure that when the Supreme Court imposes a control order, it has discretion to tailor the conditions of the order to the circumstances to achieve the aim of ensuring public safety and order, unconstrained by the nature of the declaration first obtained. For example, the Supreme Court may consider that a condition preventing the organisation from carrying on business is appropriate and that less restrictive conditions would be inadequate, given the threat the organisation poses to public safety.

The amendments therefore can be balanced against charter rights, including the right to life (section 9) and the protection of families and children (section 17). These are important objectives that help justify any limitations to charter rights that may be imposed by the making of a control order.

Amendment to the Open Courts Act 2013

The bill will also amend the Open Courts Act 2013 to clarify that that act does not affect the operation of certain provisions in the Confiscation Act which allow the court hearing an application for an unexplained wealth restraining order to require that the hearing be in closed court. This amendment merely clarifies the operation of the Open Courts Act, and in the absence of these amendments it is unlikely that the Open Courts Act would limit the operation of those provisions in the Confiscation Act.

Provisions that require a hearing be in closed court and which restrict the publication of reports of a hearing can engage rights contained in section 15 of the charter (freedom of expression) and section 24 of the charter (the right to a fair hearing). However, as this amendment makes no substantive change to the law, I consider these rights are not limited by this amendment.

The Hon. Martin Pakula, MP
Attorney-General

Second reading

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Speech as follows incorporated into *Hansard* under sessional orders:

The Confiscation and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2016 contains a number of small, but important, amendments to various pieces of legislation targeting serious and organised crime, including the Confiscation Act 1997, the Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012, and the Surveillance Devices Act 1999.

Amendments to the Confiscation Act 1997

Criminal asset confiscation is a powerful tool to disrupt and deter serious and organised crime. Those involved in organised crime — such as drug trafficking — are motivated primarily by the profits that these crimes generate. That is why asset confiscation laws — which deprive criminals of these profits — are an important tool for Victoria Police.

Victoria now has one of Australia's most comprehensive sets of confiscation laws, contained in the Confiscation Act 1997. The amendments contained in this bill are not significant alterations to these laws, but technical amendments to strengthen the laws against any possible attempts to evade their operation.

For example, one of the amendments in this bill will make clear that if a person purchases a house with a loan, and then repays that loan with the proceeds of crime, that house is not to be considered 'lawfully acquired'. While it may seem straightforward that a house purchased in those circumstances ought rightly to be considered derived from crime, an interstate court ruling in relation to the commonwealth's asset confiscation legislation has cast doubt upon this issue. This amendment, and others contained in the bill, is necessary to ensure that arguments such as these cannot successfully be made in Victoria.

The bill also contains some procedural amendments to improve the efficiency of the asset confiscation scheme. Under the act, certain confiscation orders are sought by Victoria Police, and others — usually involving more serious crime — are sought by the DPP. This is similar to the way in which less serious crimes are prosecuted in the courts by Victoria Police and more serious crimes by the DPP. However, there is a range of crimes of a mid-level of seriousness which are prosecuted by Victoria Police but for which confiscation orders can only be sought by the DPP. The amendments in this bill will correct this anomaly, by ensuring that Victoria Police can apply for confiscation orders in relation to any crime that they prosecute.

Other amendments in this bill are of less significance but still improve the efficiency of the confiscation scheme. The bill will allow Victoria Police to seek certain orders by fax or email, rather than in person. The few hours saved by this can in some cases be sufficient to prevent a person from putting assets beyond the reach of Police. The bill will also clarify that when Victoria Police issues a notice to a bank seeking information about accounts held by a person, the notice extends both to accounts currently held by that person and accounts held but recently closed by a person.

These amendments will ensure that Victoria's asset confiscation scheme cannot be frustrated by those involved in organised crime who seek to frustrate the operation of the scheme by attempting to hide the origin of their ill-gotten wealth.

Criminal Organisations Control Act amendments

The Criminal Organisations Control Act establishes a scheme under which Victoria Police can seek control orders that restrict the activities of organisations involved in serious and organised crime.

The bill will amend the Criminal Organisations Control Act to consolidate the two types of declaration which can be made against organisations — prohibitive and restrictive — into one.

Currently, the Supreme Court may make a declaration against an organisation if satisfied of certain matters connecting the organisation to criminal activity. For a 'prohibitive' declaration, the court must be satisfied of those matters beyond reasonable doubt, whereas the civil standard of proof applies for 'restrictive' declarations. This matters because certain control order conditions — such as one preventing the organisation from continuing to operate or taking on new members — can only be imposed if the declaration that applies to the organisation is a 'prohibitive' one.

Consolidating the two types of declaration into one, to which the civil standard of proof applies, will simplify the declaration provisions in the act. It will also remove the anomaly of applying the criminal standard of proof to an application for a declaration, which is a civil proceeding which carries no threat of immediate criminal sanction. The criminal standard of proof will continue to apply to determining whether a person or organisation has breached a control order, an offence which does carry a criminal sanction.

The amendment will also make it easier for Victoria Police to obtain declarations which can then be used as the basis for a control order condition preventing the organisation from operating, carrying on business, or taking on new members. I emphasise that the Supreme Court will continue to have complete discretion about whether to impose one of these conditions on a control order. This amendment means that the court will have the power to tailor a control order to the facts of the case, and to respond to the threat posed by the organisation, irrespective of the kind of declaration first obtained.

The operation of these amendments will be reviewed during the review of the operation and effectiveness of the Criminal Organisations Control Act that is required to be undertaken under section 137 of the act. This review is due to occur in 2019.

Surveillance Devices Act

The bill also makes two small but important amendments to the Surveillance Devices Act.

The act currently requires the responsible minister to table in Parliament reports on the operation of the act received from agencies exercising powers under the act. In 2015 the report I received from Victoria Police contained certain information, publication of which — in light of the heightened terrorism threat level — could be considered to involve a risk to the safety of Victoria Police members. On the advice of the chief commissioner of Victoria Police, I removed this information before I tabled the report.

Unlike corresponding reporting provisions in other investigative powers legislation, the Surveillance Devices Act

provides no mechanism for the redaction of sensitive information before tabling the report. This bill will rectify this and provide the responsible minister the ability to, on the advice of the law enforcement agency preparing the report, redact sensitive information before tabling.

The bill will also confirm that the report tabled in 2015 is compliant with the act, despite the redactions.

The bill will also amend the act to replace some now outdated references to the former department of Environment and Primary Industries contained within that act. Following machinery of government changes in 2015, most functions of the department of Environment and Primary Industries are now exercised by the successor to that department, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Some functions, however, in particular those of Fisheries Victoria, now belong to the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources. The bill will replace the references to 'Department of Environment and Primary Industries' with references to 'Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning' and references to the 'Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources'. This will ensure officers of both these departments are able to seek warrants under that act to investigate serious environmental crime.

Family Violence Protection Amendment Act 2014

The Family Violence Protection Amendment Act will establish a process for interim family violence intervention orders to automatically become final orders without a further court hearing. The reform will commence on 1 July 2016, unless proclaimed earlier.

This bill removes this default commencement date for the reform, so that it can be commenced on any date by proclamation.

The amendment will allow the government to consider the future of the reform as part of our response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which is due to report on 29 March 2016. This amendment will allow the government to consider fully the commission's report before the commencement of any reforms to interim family violence intervention orders.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr PESUTTO (Hawthorn).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 March.

HOUSE CONTRACTS GUARANTEE REPEAL BILL 2016

Statement of compatibility

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the charter), I make this

statement of compatibility with respect to the House Contracts Guarantee Repeal Bill 2016.

In my opinion, the House Contracts Guarantee Repeal Bill 2016, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The bill repeals the House Contracts Guarantee Act 1987 which has become redundant following the closure of the Domestic Building (HIH) Indemnity Fund established under the act.

Human rights issues

There are no human rights protected under the charter that are relevant to this bill. I therefore consider this bill compatible with the charter.

Robin Scott, MP
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Speech as follows incorporated into *Hansard* under sessional orders:

The bill repeals the House Contracts Guarantee Act 1987 which provided an indemnity scheme in respect of losses arising in respect of certain classes of domestic building work affected by the collapse of the HIH Insurance Group. That scheme is no longer required as the term for the lodgement of claims has expired and all lodged claims have been finalised.

As the operation of the indemnity scheme was the last residual function of the House Contracts Guarantee Act 1987 the act is now redundant.

The act established the Domestic Building (HIH) Indemnity Fund as a rescue package for home owners with builders warranty insurance provided by HIH Casualty and General Insurance Limited which was placed into provisional liquidation in 2001. The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority administered the fund under the act.

The act provides that a claim against the fund must be made within seven years of completion of building works that were covered by the HIH builders warranty insurance policy and commenced before 2001.

In accordance with section 49 of the act, having been satisfied that all claims on the fund had been dealt with and that no further claim could be made, a notice of closure of the fund was published in June 2015.

The bill also removes references to the House Contracts Guarantee Act 1987 from various acts and provides a mechanism for payments that would otherwise be paid out of or into the Domestic Building (HIH) Indemnity Fund (which was closed in July 2015) to be paid out of or into the Consolidated Fund.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr Hodgett (Croydon).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 March.

TREASURY AND FINANCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016

Statement of compatibility

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Treasury and Finance Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

In my opinion, the Treasury and Finance Legislation Amendment Bill 2016, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The bill increases the maximum penalty for a corporate body found guilty of an offence of reckless endangerment under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to address the inadequacy of the current penalty. The bill also makes a number of other minor amendments of a technical nature to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and the Workplace Injury Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2013.

Human rights issues

There are no human rights protected under the charter that are relevant to this bill. I therefore consider this bill compatible with the charter.

Robin Scott, MP
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Speech as follows incorporated into *Hansard* under sessional orders:

The bill makes several amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, and an amendment to the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 and the Accident Compensation Act 1985 to improve the operation of the legislation and strengthen safety standards in Victorian workplaces.

Penalty increase for reckless endangerment of serious injury in a workplace

The bill provides for an increase to the maximum penalty for a body corporate that is found guilty of the offence of reckless endangerment under section 32 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Section 32 creates an offence where a person, including a body corporate, without lawful excuse, recklessly engages in conduct that places or may place a person who is at the workplace in danger of serious injury. The current maximum penalty for a body corporate is 9000 penalty units, which equates to \$1 365 030. An example of an offence under section 32 is an employer failing to repair brakes on a truck that they know are faulty.

The offence of reckless endangerment requires a far greater degree of culpability than an offence against section 21, which requires an employer to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to the health of their employees. To satisfy this duty, an employer is required to eliminate risks to health and safety, and if it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate those risks, to reduce the risks to health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable. Examples of offences under section 21 are failing to use adequate fall protection where there is risk of a fall of more than 2 metres, or failing to install adequate guarding on a machine. Breach of this duty has the same maximum penalty of 9000 penalty units as the offence of reckless endangerment despite the fact the levels of culpability between the two offences are different.

Where a body corporate recklessly places a person in their workplace in danger of serious injury, it should be treated as the most serious offence under the act. Accordingly, the bill increases the penalty for bodies corporate under section 32(b) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, to a maximum fine of 20 000 penalty units, which is currently equivalent to \$3 033 400.

Occupational Health and Safety Act's regulatory powers

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 empowers the Governor in Council to make regulations with respect to various matters, including prescribing any matters with respect to licensing, registration, qualifications, permits or certificates of competency, providing for exemptions, the authorisation of persons as trainers and the examination of applicants for licences, permits or certificates of competency.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007, a person must hold a licence to perform high-risk work which arises when using certain types of plant, such as forklift trucks, cranes, scaffolding, pressure equipment and hoists. The aim of this licensing scheme is to ensure that high-risk work is performed by people who have demonstrated they have a requisite level of competency to do the work safely. Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, WorkSafe can authorise a person to train applicants for high-risk work licences and assess their competency.

This is generally undertaken by registered training organisations (RTOs) who then advise WorkSafe whether or not a licence applicant meets the relevant level of competency. This ensures that applicants for high-risk work licences demonstrate that they meet the required competencies that are agreed at a national level.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act enables regulations to be made to authorise persons to provide training to high-risk work licence applicants but does not specifically refer to the authorisation of people to assess the competency of those applicants.

The bill makes a technical amendment to clarify that regulations can be made under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to enable people to be authorised as both trainers and assessors.

Provide that the no disadvantage rule applies to all workers paid at the statutory maximum

Under Victoria's workers compensation legislation the amount of weekly payments that a worker can receive is capped at twice the state average weekly earnings. These amounts are indexed every 12 months. However in a given year average weekly earnings may reduce as a result of negative wage growth in Victoria, which could lead to a reduction in the state average weekly earnings and consequently a reduction in the weekly payments of a worker whose payments are at the statutory maximum.

This is contrary to the intent of the act under which a 'no disadvantage' rule applies for all other workers who receive weekly payments to protect them from a reduction in their weekly payments from one year to the next. However the 'no disadvantage' rule currently does not apply to all workers who receive weekly payments at the statutory maximum.

Payments in the current financial year have been affected by the negative wage growth in the previous financial year. This has resulted in inequities in the statutory maximum amount for workers depending on the date their injury arose. This means there is now a difference in the statutory maximum for workers injured prior to 1 July 2015 and those injured after that date.

The bill addresses this situation by amending the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 and Accident Compensation Act 1985 to ensure equity of application of the 'no disadvantage' rule, regardless of the date on which the worker's entitlement arose. This amendment will apply retrospectively and taken to have come into operation on 1 July 2014.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr HODGETT (Croydon).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 March.

**VICTORIA POLICE AMENDMENT
(MERIT-BASED TRANSFER) BILL 2016**

Second reading

Debate resumed from 8 March; motion of Mr SCOTT (Acting Minister for Police).

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — As I was discussing the bill before the house yesterday I was identifying a number of issues that were faced by residents in the community of Knox and their call and

request for further police numbers. As I explained, this government is not following the lead shown by the coalition government with respect to recruiting adequate police. The former government was elected on a commitment to deliver 1700 sworn police officers and 940 protective services officers (PSOs).

I am very pleased that we delivered our 1700 police, as well as our PSOs, and I remind those opposite that at the time that we sought to introduce the PSO policy into Victoria, PSOs were seen by the then opposition as plastic police. Well, I can tell those opposite that people in my community certainly do not view the performance and the actions of our PSOs as those of plastic police. They are well respected and well regarded, and they do a fantastic job. As a consequence of the work they do, we now see a significantly greater number of people attending and travelling on our public transport system because we have overcome the concerns they had about using the railway station at Ferntree Gully.

But this government has not seen fit to recruit sworn police officers to be rolled out in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. In fact the budget allocation merely provided for sworn police officers for the Bellarine Peninsula. Certainly that sent a very clear message to my community that this is a government that is not focused on delivering necessary police numbers and additional police. With the state's population growing at a rate of 100 000 residents each and every year you cannot stand still. You cannot just rely on the resources you have. You need to provide additional resources. You need to provide the resources that are needed to ensure that we have adequate police numbers in our suburbs.

The survey I conducted last year of my community received widespread support, and I received considerable feedback. The residents indicated clearly to me that they were not happy with the fact that there were not going to be any new police delivered in the Knox area. They know that there are growing concerns around family violence and there are growing concerns around the recreational use of drugs. They know that there are a number of problems that beset our community as a consequence of those activities. They know also that in matters such as traffic and petty crime there are a range of areas in which we need to ensure we have got a growing police presence to provide for the needs of the residents of Knox. That is something on which this government is not focused. It is certainly something that my community and the people who sit on this side of this house will not remain silent about.

This government is going soft when it comes to crime. It is going soft when it comes to dealing with issues relating to the handling of criminals. It is also going soft when it is talking about police presence. Our friend the member for Ivanhoe is not in the house, but he used to constantly berate those who are now on this side of the house because of the fact that his West Heidelberg police station had not been reopened.

Mr D. O'Brien interjected.

Mr WAKELING — Through you, Acting Speaker, I ask the member for Ivanhoe: what is the current status of the West Heidelberg police station, and where is the member standing up in this house arguing about the West Heidelberg police station? I look forward to his contribution on this bill in which he can explain to his community and to the people of Victoria how in fact he has now decided to go silent on his campaign to fight for the West Heidelberg police station. He was more than happy to stand in this house and fight for his community on that issue but apparently a change of government means a change of heart. I am surprised that the member, who is very active in this house, has all of a sudden gone very silent on that very important issue.

We know that this government is more focused on closing police stations, is more focused on removing resources from police stations —

Ms Kairouz interjected.

Mr WAKELING — Well, I would like him to come out to Burwood and have a talk to the communities out in the eastern suburbs. What about in Somerville? What about the fact that the member for Gembrook went to visit one of his own local police stations and it had a sign on the door saying 'This facility is currently closed'? That is what policing is under this government — and it is an absolute disgrace.

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) — I welcome the opportunity to speak briefly to the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. As previous speakers have said, this bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013 particularly as it relates to the transfer of certain police officers. Once enacted, the legislation will provide for the merit-based transfer of police officers to country general duties positions.

General duties officers are those hardworking women and men at the front line of the justice system. They work the divvy vans across the state night and day, and are the first responders of the force. They walk the beat on our streets and in our shopping centres — they patrol our cities and towns. They protect our

community. They also keep us safe, and they investigate and prevent crime.

This bill codifies in legislation reforms agreed between Victoria Police and the Police Association Victoria as part of the recent enterprise agreement process. During those negotiations, the chief commissioner and the police association agreed that general duties constable and senior constable positions at country locations should be filled via a merit-based selection process. This bill delivers the legislative amendment to the Victoria Police Act 2013 which enables this reform to be implemented.

Currently all general duties positions are filled via an expression of interest process. This is essentially a first in, best dressed system and does not always provide the best outcome. This is an important reform. No organisation should be handicapped with a system which rewards the length of service over a broad merit-based assessment of a person's suitability for a position. These reforms will reward performance and will contribute, along with other agreed reforms, to facilitating a better spread of police expertise across the state.

I congratulate the Minister for Police and the police association on reaching an agreement on what is a pragmatic and logical reform, one which provides an opportunity for demonstrable improvement in policing in our rural and regional locations while rewarding our best performing officers at constable and senior constable ranks.

I would like to put on record my appreciation of and thanks to the police who work in my electorate. They are out there sometimes at 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning. They are working the streets day and night. I have to say that there are some challenging areas in my electorate, but the police are always there, willing to go out and ensure that the community is safe, so I put my appreciation on the record. The police are always happy to speak to me and cooperate with me. I get lots of constituents coming and knocking on my door, asking me to assist them. With just simply one phone call to the police station things get done. I would like to thank them and congratulate them. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) — It gives me pleasure to talk about the Victoria Police and obviously the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. Just as a way of a bit of background for transfers throughout Victoria Police, there is a time in the Victoria Police when you go through as a probationary constable. Obviously I had that pleasure of going

through as a probationary constable in the early 2000s. Towards the end of your probation it is a bit of a nerve-racking time because you could end up anywhere in Victoria at any particular time because of transfers and fill-in positions in country and regional Victoria. It was quite common for places like Warracknabeal, Robinvale and areas around the western parts of Victoria in particular to come up on that list of where a probationary constable would be assigned after their two years at a training station, generally in the metropolitan area or somewhere along the railway lines.

It is a pretty nerve-racking time, particularly when you are a father with children who are settled — you are married, you have a mortgage and you may get told that you are going to have to move to Warracknabeal for two years. That is a fair challenge to any Victorian police officer, but they do it. Why do they do it? They do it because they love their communities and they love the areas where they work, but most of all they love Victoria and they want to make sure we have the best protection across the whole state.

I will be honest: I got out of that system. I went and did a graduate diploma in adolescent health and welfare and started a program called Operation Newstart, working with young people, which gave me an opportunity to take myself out of the ballot, so I did not end up being chosen to move to regional Victoria at the time. The positions that came up were Horsham and Warracknabeal.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BATTIN — They are great places. We were quite lucky because not only did we not have to go through a ballot but we had two members from our squads that went through who decided that that was their opportunity to move to regional Victoria. One of them has remained in regional Victoria since that time, so it has given them a real chance going forward. The new system being put in place with this bill is merit-based and I think that will give an advantage to people within Victoria Police who want to move back home or who want to take the opportunity to move out to some of these great towns in regional Victoria.

Victoria Police over the years has changed. We have all seen that and we have seen some of the drastic changes in crime. We have seen some of the ways we have to investigate things change. We have seen the way that Victorian police utilise the time they have got and how they can struggle with numbers. We were proud during the four years of the former coalition government that we delivered over 1900 extra police for Victoria for

frontline services. There were an extra 1900 police on the beat going about their daily duties protecting Victoria.

Repeating what has already been said, some of those duties are obviously operating the divisional vans, but it can be turning up to a theft, to family violence, to the most horrific scenes you will ever see. One of the worst things you will ever have to do is knock on someone's door and pass on a message that they have lost a loved one. When you have to make the decision to go up and knock on a door and pass on that message, that is something that will stay with you forever. Unless you have done it you do not quite understand that feeling of standing at a door and waiting for someone to answer. The guys and girls who are out there protecting us and delivering this message also need to be protected by the government.

It has been seen since the change of government that the number of frontline police has not increased during the last 12 or 15 months. There has been zero increase in our police numbers but there has been an increase in crime, and as I said before, we have actually seen some of our police stations having to close. Whether this is for a short or a long time does not matter.

Pakenham is the local police station down in my area and it services Cardinia. It is a big station. They have some fantastic staff down there but due to staff shortages they have had to close during some periods to make sure they have services available in the background or even a van on the road. We were down there with Channel 9 and we actually spoke to the staff at that station and at that time they were closed. They were short on staff at the Pakenham police station. It is a huge concern when you have a 24-hour police station in a growth corridor such as Pakenham with seven families a day moving to the area and the local police station is shut, the place of safety and security is closed. We went up there and you could not knock on the door, the grill was down and there was a sign on the door saying, 'Sorry, due to staff shortages we are unavailable at the moment'. That is not acceptable in this day and age.

We have spoken about some of the stations and movements and creating bigger stations in the past. This is actually one of the stations that is supposed to have been built for the future. It is supposed to have been built to protect the community not just for now but going forward and they are struggling with their police numbers. I note that members of the current government will be speaking about putting people in to take care of prisoners in the cells. Pakenham police

station does not have cells so that is not going to assist it at all. Its numbers are going to remain short.

It is vital that this government goes out and assesses the issues out there. We have had the increase in crime. There are local families down there who when they call the police expect a response as soon as possible. They want the police to come out to their door and they are not getting that service. It is a service they pay for through their taxes. It is a service that is considered vital by the government and it is essential that it is delivered. It is a service that we expect in our local communities. Just this week a house just opposite mine was broken into. When the owners of the house called the police they wanted the police to respond as quickly as they could.

Down in Casey, another area of rapid growth, you are looking at a city that will be bigger than Canberra in the future. The growth through that area has been huge. They saw extra police coming in during the four years of our government but they have since seen a reduction in police numbers in Casey for frontline duties. The Police Association Victoria has been down there. Prior to the 2014 election the member for Narre Warren South was down there standing out the front calling for extra police, but the members for Narre Warren South and Narre Warren North have now gone silent on that issue. They were on the front page of the *Berwick News* saying that our government was not doing enough but now they will not even mention police numbers because they know crime is increasing, police numbers are decreasing and this is causing concerns in my community.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member will continue his contribution when the matter is next before the house. It is now time for me to interrupt business under sessional orders for questions without notice and ministers statements.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Electorate office staff

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. With the PwC report to the Presiding Officers into Labor's electoral rorts stating clearly that 'DPS does not fund positions to support the member's political or party duties', restating what is in the members staff guide, I ask: will the Premier now admit that his party has knowingly done the wrong

thing and rorted taxpayers to the tune of more than \$1 million?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Kew is warned. The member was warned yesterday.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question.

Mr T. Smith interjected.

Questions and statements interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Kew

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Kew will withdraw from the house for a period of 1 hour. The Premier, to continue, in silence.

Honourable member for Kew withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Electorate office staff

Questions and statements resumed.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The answer is no. He is incorrect in his statements, in his assertions and in the allegations he continues to peddle around, thinking that if he says it often enough, it will somehow become true.

On behalf of the government let me say that I welcome the release of the *Casual Electorate Officer Employment Review*. Clearly the questioner has not read it. It makes a number of recommendations about the need to deal with inconsistencies and ambiguities. Clearly those opposite have not read the report and are anything but expert on its contents. I welcome the report and its findings, and the government stands ready to work with you, Speaker, with the President of the Legislative Council and with the Parliament to implement any of those recommendations canvassed.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — Given the Premier has never denied that casual Labor electorate office staff, paid for by the Parliament, worked as campaign organisers outside of their designated electorates, will he now apologise for his party's rorting

of the parliamentary staff system and pay the money back?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He is wrong in the assertions he makes and the allegations he makes. He can have as much volume as he likes, he can be as loud and as angry as he likes, but it does not make the nonsense he is peddling accurate or correct in any way. I dealt with this matter in my earlier answer.

Ministers statements: education funding

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I am very pleased to update the house on work that the Department of Education and Training has done in analysing the harsh impact of the federal government's failure to fund the Gonski agreement appropriately. This will affect every single school — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS — Those opposite never get more upset than when you criticise their mates in Canberra. They have got their voices now. It is a very simple — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the issue. He also needs to confine his remarks to informing the house about new government initiatives, projects and achievements. A critique of the federal government does not come within the terms of the sessional orders.

Mr ANDREWS — On the point of order, Speaker, this government has commissioned an analysis by the department of education, and it clearly indicates just how much damage will be done. It is entirely within order for me to provide the house with information about the impact of the cutbacks that the Turnbull government is making in every school in every part of our state. The fact that those opposite do not like their friends being criticised is not a function of the standing orders; it is a function of the fact that they are Liberals first and Victorians second.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair does not uphold the point of order at this point. The Premier is entitled to make remarks in passing and to set the scene. I ask the Premier to confine himself to that and to return to making a statement.

Mr ANDREWS — As a government we have commissioned that important analysis, and what it

shows is \$1.1 billion over 2018–19 will be cut from our schools.

Mr M. O'Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Malvern is warned.

Mr ANDREWS — Again the Liberal apologists opposite! Let us just get the record straight — —

Mr R. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte is warned.

Mr ANDREWS (— Those opposite are actually cheering Malcolm Turnbull on.

Mr Wakeling — On a point of order, Speaker, maybe the Premier may wish to explain to Victorians why he has decided — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Ferntree Gully will resume his seat. In passing, the Chair reflects that the Chair had incorrectly warned yesterday the member for Gembrook and in fact those warnings had been intended for the member for Ferntree Gully. Some warnings on Wednesdays work like frequent flyer points; they can be transferred. I do transfer them to the member for Ferntree Gully. The Premier, to continue in silence.

Mr ANDREWS — If you cut school funding, you hurt school students — it is as simple as that — and the commonwealth government is bringing to bear the most savage cutbacks to education that this nation has ever seen. What that analysis shows is that every school is worse off. To give one example, Northern Bay College P-12 in the great city of Geelong has had cuts of between \$3.4 million and \$4.6 million. That is the cutback that that school community will have to endure because Mr Turnbull does not understand — —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has now had ample opportunity to set a context. He is now defying your order. He needs to come back to informing the house about his government's initiatives, projects or achievements.

Mr ANDREWS — On the point of order, Speaker, I am updating the house on the fact that it is not commentary out of Canberra, not possible decisions, but actual decisions of the commonwealth government, analysed appropriately by our government, which would see, in the case of Northern Bay College P-12, a cutback of between \$3.4 million and \$4.6 million. That

is very much a matter of government business. Whether those opposite like it or not, that is not the point at issue.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the point of order. I ask the Premier to come back to making a statement.

Mr ANDREWS — It would be remiss of our government not to properly analyse what the impact of these cutbacks will be — 8000 teachers, 10 000 allied health staff, none of whom will be available to the system. That means students will fall behind. It means students will not be supported.

Mr Wakeling — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is defying your order. He needs to be referring to ‘new government initiatives, projects and achievements’. If he were here explaining that he was agreeing to fund the final two years of Gonski, that would be a new initiative, but clearly he is not.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier to continue on his ministers statement.

Mr ANDREWS — This analysis is both new and very important, and is undertaken by our government because we are not going to be apologists for the Turnbull government. Malcolm Turnbull should visit Northern Bay P-12 with me and see the damage he is doing.

Ombudsman jurisdiction

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is again to the Premier. Why has the Premier chosen to try to frustrate the Ombudsman’s investigation into Labor’s rorting of casual electorate staff by now challenging her authority in the Supreme Court when just a month ago he said he would not?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I am not. The government is not. The opposition leader — —

Mr Guy interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — You’ve asked your question. You’ve asked your question, and I’m answering it.

Mr R. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte will come to order.

Mr ANDREWS — The assertion in the question is completely wrong. As with most things, the Leader of the Opposition is at best confused and at worst trying to

say, you know, ‘If I say it often enough, it’ll be true’. His question is wrong; simple as that.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — That will be news to the government’s lawyers at the Supreme Court! Is the Premier’s challenging of the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction not yet again the Labor Party using public money to try to hide the fact that it has rorted taxpayers dollars for party-political purposes?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — The answer is no.

Ministers statements: education funding

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Education) — I rise to inform the house of new analysis completed by the Victorian Department of Education and Training that shows the impact of the Turnbull government’s decision to walk away from the Gonski funding. The figures released today — —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, I refer to the guidance you have previously given to the Premier in relation to his ministers statement which related to exactly the same topic as that raised by the Minister for Education. Similarly I ask you to instruct the Minister for Education to confine his statement to ‘new government initiatives, projects and achievements’. It is not in order for him to embark on a critique of other governments. He needs to tell the house what his government is doing.

Mr MERLINO — On the point of order, Speaker, I had been speaking for just over 20 seconds. I was putting the context in regard to the analysis by the department of education which informs the decisions of the government, and I am just about to speak in terms of the action that I have taken following the receipt of this analysis. I had only been speaking for 20 seconds.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier must comply with sessional orders and explain how this constitutes a new government initiative, project or achievement. The Deputy Premier, to continue.

Mr MERLINO — The figures that I have released today, and I am happy to make them available to all members, reveal that the Turnbull Liberal government is short-changing Victorian students to the tune of over \$1.1 billion in 2018–19. The new initiative, the action that I have taken: I have written today to the federal minister — —

Mr Wakeling — On a point of order, Speaker, I would like to renew the point of order that was made by the member for Box Hill. ‘Initiatives, projects and achievements’ does not include writing a letter. What the minister should be doing — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Ferntree Gully is entitled to make a point of order and to be heard in silence in the same way that the Deputy Premier is entitled to make a ministers statement in silence. The member will come succinctly to making the point of order.

Mr Wakeling — If the minister wants to actually take action, what he should be doing is standing up in this house saying that he will commit to fund the final two years of Gonski.

Mr Pakula interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the Attorney-General that he is to resume his seat when the Chair is on his feet. However, the Attorney-General, on the point of order, in silence.

Mr Pakula — On the point of order, Speaker, the member for Ferntree Gully took his point of order after the minister had simply said, ‘I have written’. The house has not yet heard what the context or the content of that writing is. It might be that the minister has written indicating a particular action that he has taken, or it might be that the minister has written asking the federal government to take a particular course of action. I think before the member for Ferntree Gully raises a point of order seeking to shut the minister down, the house is entitled to hear about the content of any correspondence that has been written.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier was in order. The Deputy Premier, to continue.

Mr MERLINO — Thank you, Speaker. On this side of the house we will take action. When our schools lose funding, we will take action and take it up to the Turnbull government.

I have written today to the federal Minister for Education and Training with the analysis of the department of education that shows the impact on each and every school in Victoria of the Turnbull government cutting funding: for the member for Ripon, Ararat Secondary College — \$400 000 to \$500 000; for the member for South Barwon — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, I refer to comments that you made back on 21 October last year, specifically in fact to the Minister for Education, when you said:

I request of all ministers that they adhere to the spirit of the sessional orders ... I request additional effort in relation to compliance with sessional orders.

It is clear that the minister has put no effort into this particular ministers statement, and I ask you to bring him back in line with the sessional orders.

Mr MERLINO — On the point of order, Speaker, you have just ruled that my statement was in order. Warrandyte High School is losing \$500 000. How about you stand up for Warrandyte High? How about you stand up for them?

Mr Pesutto interjected.

Questions and statements interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Hawthorn

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Hawthorn will withdraw from the house for a period of 1 hour.

Honourable member for Hawthorn withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Ministers statements: education funding

Questions and statements resumed.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier to conclude his point of order.

Mr MERLINO — In conclusion on the point of order, Speaker, I have written to the federal minister. I will seek to meet with the federal minister for education. The department has done its analysis. For the Leader of the Opposition, Bulleen Heights School — \$1.3 million to \$1.5 million.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier will resume his seat. The Deputy Premier was on a very extensive point of order. The Chair has heard from the Deputy Premier sufficiently.

Mr Clark — On the point of order, Speaker, I find myself in the unusual position of agreeing with part of

the submission made earlier by the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General submitted at that point that the minister was in order because it may have been that he was about to inform the house of actions the Victorian government was taking that he had set out in his letter. If he had been doing that, it would have been in order, but it is clear from what he is saying that he is simply referring to the analysis that his department has made, so he is therefore not complying with the sessional order and informing the house about new Victorian government initiatives, projects and achievements. He is out of order, and I ask you to bring him back into order.

Ms Allan — Hopefully finally on the point of order that has been raised, Speaker, earlier in the Deputy Premier's answer you ruled him entirely in order in providing this information to the house about the actions he is taking, which is entirely consistent with sessional order 7. It would indeed be expected of a Victorian government minister to vigorously take up this case with the federal government, so I ask that you rule these constant points of order out of order, as they just illustrate that the opposition is more interested in gagging the real impact of these cuts on schools than allowing the Deputy Premier to do his job.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair has heard from both opposition and government members. The Chair, when required, consults with the Clerk on the subject, which remains, as members would understand and appreciate, somewhat challenging. However, the Chair concludes as follows: that the Deputy Premier was explaining about the initiative that he had undertaken, and in that context he was explaining what the content of that correspondence or new government initiative was. Therefore the Chair does not uphold the point of order and asks the Deputy Premier to continue and to be heard in silence.

Mr MERLINO — Thank you, Speaker. There was a heads of agreement signed by the then Prime Minister and the then Premier of the day. I am writing to the federal education minister to say that the federal government is in breach of that heads of agreement. For the member for Morwell — Traralgon Secondary College, \$1.2 million to \$1.3 million; for the shadow education minister — Wantirna College, \$1.1 million to \$1.3 million. They should join with us and put the pressure on the Turnbull government.

Electorate office staff

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Just this week to the media the Premier said, 'If you break the rules, you pay the

price'. The PwC report clearly shows that the Labor government — the Premier's MPs — have broken the rules. I ask: what price will the Premier's MPs pay for breaking the rules or is he simply running a protection racket for those who have rorted the system?

Ms Ryall interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Ringwood. I will not warn the member again. I caution the Premier to respond in the context of government administration only with respect to the question put by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — Thank you very much, Speaker. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and I thank you for your guidance. I would simply by way of answer say that the report says nothing of the sort. Clearly the Leader of the Opposition perhaps thought it was inconvenient to read the report. He wrote the questions before he read the report; I am pretty sure of that. He is wrong, and his mischaracterisation of the report is a commentary on him and nothing more.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, I fail to see what is ambiguous about, 'The Parliament does not fund positions to support the member's political duties'. There is nothing ambiguous about that — nothing at all.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte will resume his seat. The member for Warrandyte is a senior member of the house and understands that that is not a point of order. The Premier has concluded his answer. The Leader of the Opposition, in silence, on a supplementary question.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — Again referring to the report that clearly says, 'DPS does not fund positions to support the member's political or party duties' — it cannot be clearer than that — I ask simply: why is the Premier denying wrongdoing, avoiding responsibility, frustrating the Ombudsman's investigation, refusing to pay the money back and treating Victorians with total contempt?

The SPEAKER — Order! I call on the Premier to respond to the supplementary question with respect to government administration matters.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — Speaker, I thank you for your guidance. It was more of an angry speech than a supplementary question; I am sure you could agree with that. The assertions made by the Leader of the

Opposition are wrong, and they come from perhaps not having read the report. I would again, for his benefit and all Victorians' benefit, indicate that no-one in this government will be taking integrity lessons from the Leader of the Opposition.

Ministers statements: education funding

Ms HUTCHINS (Minister for Industrial Relations) — I would like to update the house on a new initiative, and that is today's release of the My School data, which has a direct impact on how many schools are doing an excellent job of getting the most out of what they can in educating our kids. I know from my role in assisting the Minister for Education on the negotiation of the current teachers enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) that at the forefront of teachers' minds is not just their pay but how the broader conditions help them deliver quality education. That EBA, which is currently under negotiation, is likely to run into the years 2018 and 2019.

I know that the My School data places very important emphasis on the resourcing of teachers and helping our schools, improving our state levels of education. The new schools data, combined with the decision by the federal government to walk away from Gonski in 2018–19, will have a very big impact on these current negotiations.

Members will be aware that much of the discussion occurring as we bargain in good faith with the Australian Education Union is about how education is delivered. Teachers are coming to the table with some pretty great ideas, and we are considering those. That is why it is clear to me that by short-changing Victorian students by \$1.1 billion in 2018–19 Malcolm Turnbull will be hurting teachers and hurting students. Before the last election the Liberals promised that they would not cut education and that they would honour their full commitment to Gonski, yet walking away from the deal means a cut of \$1 billion to Victorian schools. One school in my electorate alone, Copperfield College, is at risk of losing up to \$3 million in those two years. Ripping money out of schools hurts students — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Wakeling — On a point of order, Speaker, on the basis of relevance. The minister is meant to be raising new — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Ferntree Gully is entitled to silence on a point of order. The Chair is unable to hear him.

Mr Wakeling — The minister is meant to be talking about new initiatives and projects and achievements. The minister referred to election commitments at the last election. Maybe I could call on the minister to explain why the government has walked away from its commitment to fund the final two months of Gonski — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Ferntree Gully will resume his seat. The minister, to continue in silence.

Ms HUTCHINS — Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull wants an agile and innovative Australia, but by cutting funding and short-changing Victorian students and teachers he is going to deliver the absolute reverse of that.

Coal exploration licences

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) — My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Given the government's announcement that it is reviewing previous government programs for coal development, will the minister also be reviewing licences granted for coal exploration and extraction, such as the one covering the Bacchus Marsh area?

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. I know it is easy for the member for Melbourne to get up and grandstand on these issues, but I am not going to be doing that. I am not going to be providing a public commentary. This is a responsible government that undertakes commitments to review current policies and previous policies in terms of coal. That is what we are actually going to be doing, so I am not going to be standing here or on the front steps of the Parliament to grandstand on this issue. Public commentary will have its place, and it is not now while we are undertaking a review.

The Greens really would not appreciate very well at all the importance of proper process. A real government, a government that actually says it will do things and actually does do things and delivers things, understands the importance of a proper process, both for the community in terms of their confidence and in terms of certainty for industry. We will always have that balance right. Since coming to government we have been working tirelessly to look at the transition of our energy supply to a clean energy future. That is what we will be doing, and we will be doing that through a proper process, as indicated.

The member for Melbourne mentioned a particular coal application that is before me. Again I will say quite clearly there is a proper process that will be undertaken by this government, and we will make the right decisions and make the public announcements at the right time. Let it not be forgotten that since coming to government we have wasted no time in moving to a clean energy future, transitioning our energy supply to a clean energy supply. We will do that, unlike those opposite, who, the Leader of the Opposition knows full well, held the pen and signed the death warrant on our wind energy laws that actually stopped investment in clean energy right here in Victoria.

We are not going to do that. We have got a plan. We have already implemented some significant recommendations and policies that have been welcomed by the community right across Victoria, and we will continue to do that. We will soon be releasing our renewable energy action plan, we will soon be releasing our energy efficiency and productivity strategy and we will get on with the job of transitioning to a clean energy future.

Supplementary question

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) — The minister talked about proper process and review; however, last year the minister said she would be assuming personal responsibility for licence renewals as she blamed her department for the renewal of four coal licences in that year. Does the minister believe the people of Bacchus Marsh deserve to know whether exploratory licence EL 5294 will be renewed on 22 March this year or not?

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I thank the member for Melbourne for her supplementary question. The rank hypocrisy from the member for Melbourne, the rank hypocrisy of the Greens when they talk about proper processes! Frankly I do not stand back and shirk responsibilities when it comes to proper processes, unlike those opposite, who are very keen on, and have got a record of doing, dirty deals behind closed doors. Just have a look at their federal counterparts, who are doing dirty deals with the Malcolm Turnbull government to get certain reforms up in the upper house.

Mr Howard interjected.

Questions and statements interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Buninyong

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Buninyong will withdraw from the house for a period of 1 hour. I warn members that, when the Chair is on his feet, members are to remain silent. I further remind members that the Chair has not met this year's key performance indicators as my predecessors Speaker Fyffe and Speaker Smith.

Under standing order 125 the Speaker has a little fund which is used for the purpose of supporting research into various areas. That fund is now at zero; therefore the Chair is encouraged to have members withdraw in due course if necessary under standing order 125 in order to generate funds for that little fund, which is used very gratefully.

Honourable member for Buninyong withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Coal exploration licences

Supplementary question

Questions and statements resumed.

Mr Hibbins — On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister is halfway through her answer. The question was very specific regarding coal exploration licences, and instead she is talking about imaginary preference deals at a federal level. I ask you, Speaker, to direct her back to the actual substance of the question.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The temptation to use standing order 125 is growing intensely. We need funds to support good research. The member for Prahran, in silence.

Mr Hibbins — On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I ask that the minister return to answering the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister, to come back to answering the question.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy and Resources) — Thank you, Speaker. As I said earlier in my preliminary comments on the supplementary

question, we have got a proper process that we will undertake when it comes to consideration of any licence applications. We will not be lectured by those opposite. We will not be lectured by the Greens with their rank hypocrisy in terms of dirty deals. They are the ones who let go on the carbon price when it first came into Parliament, introduced by federal Labor. They killed it off, and I will not be lectured by them.

Mr Hibbins — On the point of order, Speaker, I refer to sessional order 11(2):

The Speaker may determine that an answer to an oral question without notice ... is not responsive to the question, and may ... direct the minister to provide a written response ...

The minister's response was not responsive, and I ask that a written response be provided.

Ms Allan — On the point of order, Speaker, in asking you to rule the point of order of the member for Prahran out of order, I suggest that the member for Prahran is confusing his unhappiness with the answer with the fact that the minister was being directly relevant. He might not like the content, but she was certainly being relevant to the question that was asked, and I ask you to rule him out of order.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair does not uphold the point of order as put by the member for Prahran. The minister was being responsive.

Ministers statements: inner-city schools

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Planning) — I rise to inform the house of a new government initiative and actions the government is taking in planning for new schools around the inner city. We are moving to the next stage of planning for schools in Melbourne's thriving Docklands precinct. As we know, more and more families are moving to the Docklands, and there is a growing demand for townhouses and larger apartments in the inner city. Already we know there will be a shortfall of 4800 primary and 2000 secondary school places within the inner city by 2031. We are making sure plans are in place so that students have somewhere to go to school.

The next stage in planning for a Docklands school will involve working with the community to identify the best locations for future primary and secondary schools. I am pleased to say I am working with the Minister for Education to deliver a school with a playground at Fishermans Bend. I do not need to remind the house of what this cost Victorian taxpayers; it is almost \$20 million because of the decisions of those opposite.

We are also planning a new school for my own electorate of Richmond, because we recognise that proper planning means planning for communities, and Labor plans for communities.

School infrastructure funding fell under the Liberals to a mere \$200 million, which is hard to understand when we need to look after an additional 80 000 schoolchildren in the next five years. The Andrews Labor government's record funding boost to school infrastructure will start repairing the damage done under four years of the previous government.

Ministers office accommodation

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Can the minister confirm that she has spent \$7000 of taxpayers money to establish her own ministerial quarters — a personal chairman's lounge — at Bendigo railway station, just 300 metres from her own electorate office?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The opposition asked a question. The opposition will allow the minister to respond to a substantive question as put by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — How delighted I am to be able to inform the house that I take very seriously my dual responsibilities as being Minister for Public Transport and representing a regional electorate in this Parliament, as have other ministers and other members of Parliament before me on all sides of Parliament. Someone who comes to mind is the former federal minister for small business, Fran Bailey, who established an office in Gisborne.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister, to continue in silence.

Ms ALLAN — I am happy to confirm that I have established a ministerial base at the V/Line office.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The opposition asked a question. The minister is responsive to that question. The minister, to continue in silence.

Ms ALLAN — It may be a surprise to those who cannot get out of the centre of Melbourne, it might come as a bit of a shock to them, that V/Line has offices in regional Victoria. As a result of the

opportunity of there being surplus space in the Bendigo — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair will resume having members withdraw from the house should disruption continue. The minister, to continue in silence.

Ms ALLAN — Giving me the opportunity to undertake a lot of my ministerial responsibilities based in Bendigo, I have taken up space in the V/Line office in Bendigo, which happens to be located at the train station. I would have thought having a Minister for Public Transport have an office at a train station would be something seen as a positive.

Mr Burgess interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Hastings is warned. The minister, to continue.

Ms ALLAN — I would also like to add that I appreciate issues of probity are beyond those opposite, but it is entirely inappropriate for a minister to run ministerial duties from a parliamentary office. As they would know, there is the separation between the Parliament and the government. I appreciate that those opposite get confused on these matters of probity and would rather do deals around a kitchen table than a ministerial table. That is why, as has been the practice in the past — —

Mr Wells interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Rowville is warned.

Ms ALLAN — As has been in the practice in the past, when I was Minister for Regional Development I had a base in Bendigo. When I am the Minister for Public Transport, I am also very proud to say I have a base in Bendigo.

Supplementary question

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) — Given that the minister is as disdainful of her own constituents as she is of her own colleagues, what will be next — her own private carriage?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair rules that question to be frivolous and out of order.

Ministers statements: economy

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) — I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's achievements in growing the Victorian economy. The great news is that the most recent release of the ABS national account figures giving state final demand for the year ended December 2015 show that in the Victorian economy state final demand is running at 4.6 per cent. When you combine that with the 68 000 jobs that have been created under the Andrews Labor government, you see that this is an outstanding achievement. This is a sign of an economy on the move. It validates what we have suspected for some time — that Victoria is once again the place to live and to do business.

The economy, to put into perspective what these national account figures tell us, is experiencing almost double the growth of 2.4 per cent that was seen by the previous government in its final year. Thanks to Labor, Victoria is once again outperforming New South Wales, which only managed 3.4 per cent in its state final demand. What makes this all the more impressive is that we have done it without any assistance from the federal government. Members of the federal government are sitting on their backsides doing nothing. All we have received is 9 per cent of federal infrastructure funds, not to mention the \$1.1 billion the federal government has ripped out of Victorian schools for 2018 and 2019. That is something those opposite would be well familiar with — cutting services and building phoney surpluses whilst Victorians suffer.

This growth in the Victorian economy shows what can be achieved when this government is active and engaged. It is in stark contrast to the performance of those opposite.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Mornington electorate

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — (Question 6920) My question is for the Minister for Education. The population of the Mornington Peninsula continues to rise, and that growth is particularly apparent in rising numbers of both primary and secondary students. This year Balcombe Grammar School has seen a significant increase in the number of students using the bus system to travel to school. That increase has led to a series of incidents in which up to 20 students have been denied access to the south-bound afternoon service from that school. An additional south-bound service is urgently needed. My question to the minister is: what action will he take to ensure that transport is available for all

students, not just those lucky enough to get on the bus before capacity is reached?

Carrum electorate

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) — (Question 6921) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. Constituents in my electorate are very concerned that the federal Liberal government will not fund years 5 and 6 of the Gonski national funding agreement. I ask the minister: how much worse off will schools in my electorate of Carrum be if the federal Liberal government does not fund years 5 and 6 of this agreement? The Gonski funding model addresses student disadvantage and ensures that funding is directed to the areas that need it most. There is an unacceptable link between low achievement and student disadvantage. Gonski funding focuses on breaking this link and ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have the skills to shape their future. If the federal Liberal government walks away from its obligations under the Gonski national agreement, what will this mean for schools and students in my electorate?

Gippsland South electorate

Mr D. O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) — (Question 6962) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask him to advise whether he has sought funding from the federal government for the Princes Highway duplication between Traralgon and Sale, and the Black Spur highway realignment in South Gippsland. As the minister would be aware, work on the Princes Highway has been going for some time; \$160 million is required for the two remaining stages of the Princes Highway duplication. The minister needs to ask the federal government for a contribution, which historically has been 80 per cent of the total price. I would assume that he has done so, but I would like him to respond as to whether he has asked the federal government for that money. Also in relation to the Black Spur realignment, which is a \$51 million project, I ask whether he intends to ask the commonwealth for funding for that project as well.

Sunbury electorate

Mr J. BULL (Sunbury) — (Question 6963) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Last week the minister announced that delays can be expected on the West Gate Freeway and the Bolte Bridge due to the major construction of an extra lane off the Bolte Bridge and along the West Gate Freeway. The minister advised that the works would help to

untangle a congested piece of road that has a major impact on the performance of the M1 corridor, Melbourne's economic spine. The minister has advised that the project will create 1400 jobs, improve travel times and reduce accidents by 20 per cent. Nearly three-quarters of residents in my electorate travel in their cars to and from work each day, and these works will have a significant impact on their daily commute. Can the minister provide information on these expected delays and ways in which VicRoads is working to minimise these?

Sandringham electorate

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — (Question 6964) I refer the Minister for Public Transport to government plans for sky rail along the Frankston line, and I ask on behalf of my constituents and constituents in adjoining electorates: why were the sky rail plans not announced before the election?

Geelong electorate

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) — (Question 6965) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health, and my question is: what is the latest information the minister can provide on the impact of the Turnbull federal government's health funding clawback as it relates to Barwon Health? I ask the minister this because there is news that Barwon Health is facing a \$3.47 million cut to its bottom-line budget as a result of the latest round of savage health funding cuts from the federal Liberal government. The cut is set to hit University Hospital Geelong in March, creating a funding black hole nine months into its annual budget. Barwon Health has been hit hard by the federal Liberal government's \$73 million in cuts — a direct attack on Victorian patients and their families. It is just not good enough, and the people of my electorate deserve better than this.

Burwood electorate

Mr WATT (Burwood) — (Question 6966) My question is to the Acting Minister for Police. I refer to the chief of staff of the police minister previously stating that the Ashburton area has an 80 per cent higher crime rate than the rest of Boroondara and a 26 per cent higher crime rate than the state average. The protective services officer (PSO) rollout was scheduled to be completed in 2015. The Ashburton police station has been cut from seven days a week down to two day shifts a week. Additionally there are a number of train stations along the Alamein line that are currently without PSOs, including Alamein station, which has been boarded up. I went down there recently, and it has

been boarded up. The question I ask is: when will the Alamein station get PSOs?

Essendon electorate

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — (Question 6967) My constituency question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. I have a large Horn of Africa community in my electorate, many members of which are interested in starting their own small businesses, which is something to be applauded and encouraged. I think if we can get the first generation to start their own businesses and have equity in their own businesses to create real wealth, then we maximise the chances of members of the second generation getting a decent-quality education and developing their own wealth and prosperity. My question is: what is the latest information on how Small Business Victoria can help members of the Horn of Africa community start small businesses?

Bass electorate

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) — (Question 6968) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. I am getting repeated requests from the residents of Pakenham to widen the McGregor Road railway crossing from two lanes to four lanes. This request is supported by the Cardinia Shire Council, which has identified the crossing as the biggest bottleneck for traffic in the entire shire. Will the minister look into this matter for the constituents residing in Pakenham, but also for the many users of the road from outside of town, as it provides a major thoroughfare onto the Pakenham bypass?

Frankston electorate

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) — (Question 6969) My constituency question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Can the minister advise what the government is doing through the Community Renewables Solar Grants Initiative to support lifesaving clubs and help them to allocate more of their funds to day-to-day operations? Because these clubs are volunteer-based services, we need to do everything we can to lighten their load so they can concentrate on training volunteers and saving lives. Lifesaving clubs provide a critical service to Victorians, and energy costs can be significant for them. This includes the Frankston Life Saving Club, which is such an important part of my community.

VICTORIA POLICE AMENDMENT (MERIT-BASED TRANSFER) BILL 2016

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) — I will continue where I left off earlier. I was speaking about crime issues particularly through Pakenham, Casey and Cardinia and the crime rise we have seen down there. In the constituency questions we have just heard, a member raised one of the other issues we have down in our area — that is, we have seen paperwork from the Chief Commissioner of Police and a letter from his office in relation to protective services officers (PSOs) and their allocation. The allocations were all to have been completed by now — PSOs were going to be allocated to every railway station throughout metropolitan Melbourne and some of the regional stations. This is interesting because I have one of the largest stations in the area of Beaconsfield. Although Beaconsfield is still growing, the growth there has been quite rapid over the years, and it is a very well-established neighbourhood. The community there has asked in the past and continues to ask why it has missed out on PSOs when other stations in the area have been allocated them.

Beaconsfield and Officer are two stations along the line that currently do not have PSOs. I would say that Beaconsfield at the moment is probably the more important because of the number of people who go through there. Officer station is located in the middle of a paddock area, but it is in a growth corridor and so it will require PSOs in the future. It is important that we start to speak to those people in Beaconsfield and explain to them why they have not had the opportunity to have PSOs at their station.

We all know that the PSOs do a great job. We know that obviously they do a great job protecting us here in the Victorian Parliament, and they do a great job of protecting people down at the Shrine of Remembrance. They have done a fantastic job — and I have had the pleasure of working with them — at the courts in Dandenong and in Melbourne. I will also say that the work they do on our railway stations is not only about standing on a railway station but also includes escorting people out to their cars, making people feel safer and generally increasing the perception of safety on our trains and railway stations — and that is just as important as actually increasing safety. To see evidence of that we only have to go down the road to Dandenong station. There was a very poor history at that railway station in relation to crime, and when I was working in Dandenong we quite regularly had to attend down

there. I have spoken to police in the area now and they say the reduction in the number of times they get called out to the Dandenong train station has been huge, and that means we have got more police available on the beat.

The issues with Victoria Police are something that this government has failed to handle correctly. It needs to start putting in place genuine plans to increase police numbers, to make sure we can keep up with growth. Police numbers have to be kept up so that we have the same ratio of police per 100 000 population throughout the state.

We have got growth corridors down our way in Casey and Cardinia. As I have said before, we have more than seven families moving in each and every day — it is not a week, it is not a month, it is each and every day — and they cannot rely on the services that they need in a whole range of things, including health and education. At the moment it is crime that is the no. 1 issue on the lips of Victorians down in my electorate. It is a huge issue.

While I was at the Cockatoo show on the weekend and the Berwick show the weekend before, the no. 1 issue people were talking about was crime. They have seen an increase in crime throughout our area. We saw reports in the *Herald Sun* recently in relation to people breaking into houses and stealing keys. A restaurant owner in Berwick was confronted by someone inside his house, and that person had a knife. People are starting to feel unsafe in their own properties, and they are starting to feel unsafe walking down the street. I am lucky. I live in Berwick, one of the best parts of the world. I have got one of the greatest communities, and we live in a fantastic place to raise a family. We must keep that perception going forward, and the way to keep that perception going forward is to have more police on the beat protecting the community.

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) — I am also pleased to rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. I would like to disagree with the member for Gembrook because I think I actually live in the best part of the world — and that would be Bendigo, of course. I would like to begin by congratulating and sincerely thanking the hardworking men and women of Victoria Police, who do an outstanding job across our communities. They not only keep us safe, which is only one part of what they do, but they are also a very reassuring presence in every town. They work with our local people, local organisations and local businesses. It is not just about doing their job; it is also about building a strong community that looks out for each other.

I would like to briefly mention, if I may, some recent occurrences in Bendigo in my electorate where we have had some protests. Victoria Police has been called to support our community during that time, and I have to say its members have done a remarkable job. It is very unfortunate that the out-of-town people who came along to Bendigo to protest meant that Victoria Police resources needed to be sent to Bendigo, rather than defending other communities, just to stop these protests from getting out of hand. It is very unfortunate, but I want to thank Bendigo police and the other members of Victoria Police who have indeed travelled to Bendigo on a number of occasions now to protect our community.

We are fully in support of this bill. It is really important because it is about regional and country police stations, single officer stations in particular — and I think there are about 99 single police officer stations across regional Victoria. In my electorate I have several, including Maldon and Newstead. I particularly pay my respects to and I praise those particular police officers in those smaller communities, because they do just about every type of police work that you can imagine. They are indeed an integral part of those communities that they support. Oftentimes they are very much under the microscope, not only the police officers but also their families, because they have to engage with people on a personal level. They know the members of the community. They might have a beer with them down at the pub or they might be involved in the local footy and netball teams et cetera, so they are an absolutely vital part of those communities, and yet they are there to uphold the law, which is a fine balance. I commend them for the work they do.

This bill is indeed about allowing the transfer of positions in regional areas, and it aims to recruit police officers to positions of their preference. There are circumstances of course when no applications for vacant positions are received, and when this happens, Victoria Police can readvertise the positions and further highlight, if you like, a position's benefits. Victoria Police may also consider the policing needs of the communities that require additional police and allocate a suitably qualified police officer to a particular station. For example, recently graduated police officers may be allocated to positions where a selection process has not successfully identified a candidate for the role.

As I said, single officer station positions provide particular challenges and require particular skills, and it is for this very reason that these positions are currently subject to a more robust selection process. This current process is consistent with the processes that will apply

under the new merit-based selection reform contained in this bill.

I will just mention some of the work that this government has been doing in supporting Victoria Police, and that includes of course upgrading the unsafe and unreliable police radio system with a secure and encrypted network, which will also keep our regional police officers safer when they are on patrol.

I would like to refer to the \$148.6 million investment in 400 new police custody officers, which will mean that our sworn police officers across Victoria can get back on the beat.

Ms Ryall interjected.

Ms EDWARDS — I am getting there. As we know, I was very pleased recently to welcome the first of three custody officers — there will be more. Two have started at Bendigo recently. Bendigo police are very excited to have them in the Bendigo police district because they will relieve our local police officers of having to babysit prisoners in police cells, which is indeed what they were having to do, and will assist them in transferring prisoners to and from court.

One of the things that I would like to touch on is family violence. Family violence disproportionately affects women, particularly in rural and regional communities. I offer some statistics. Between 2013 and 2014 there were 1526 family violence reports per 100 000 people in regional Victoria made to the police, compared with 1007 per 100 000 reports in Melbourne. Family violence is indeed the no. 1 law and order issue in Victoria and Australia and it takes up one-third of police work. It costs our economy billions every year and clogs up our regional courtrooms. Far more serious than that, though, is that it also takes the lives of Australian women, and last year it took the life of one Australian woman every single week.

I think those statistics clearly indicate that the work our police are doing is not just about protecting communities but is at the coalface of family disputes and family violence. I know that in Bendigo our sexual offences and child abuse (SOCA) team, who work very closely with our child protection unit and the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) at the multidisciplinary centre, do an amazing job. In fact the SOCA team are the front line, if you like, and do extraordinary work. They are the ones who have to go out and confront family violence pretty much on a daily basis. I also thank the others at the multidisciplinary centre — the child protection workers and the CASA workers — who also do incredible work.

I know that those opposite have been saying that the government has not invested in police, but clearly the Andrews Labor government's first budget, for 2015–16, suggests otherwise, because that delivered a record \$2.5 billion to Victoria Police to continue its important work in keeping our committee safe. We will continue to work with the police and treat them with respect. This of course has already been demonstrated by the agreement between government and Victoria Police through their recent enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) negotiations. Those opposite did not care about Victoria Police, did not listen to it, meddled in its affairs, as we know, and cut from its budget. In fact the former coalition government made budget cuts of over \$113 million from the Victoria Police budget between 2010–11 and 2014–15. Victoria Police has also advised that there was a target to reduce 350 police support staff.

We know that we have already committed to an increase of almost 700 police personnel to keep our community safe. This includes the police custody officers that have been stationed right across regional Victoria and in the city. The Night Network has an additional 171 police personnel. The serious sex offenders response unit has nine extra police personnel. We have been giving police the tools they need, including, as I said, the regional digital radio system and the Ballarat safety package, which saw an extra 15 sworn members. We want to continue working with Victoria Police. This particular bill is exactly what it has asked for in its EBA, so we are getting on with delivering it through this piece of legislation. I look forward to continuing working with the police officers in my electorate.

Mr KATOS (South Barwon) — It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon and make a contribution to the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. This bill, which is quite a small bill, comes about after the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) negotiations between Victoria Police and the Police Association Victoria. It basically has to do with the deployment of country-based general duties police officers. Currently the system basically is that you put your name on a list to go to a certain town and when a position becomes available you move up the list, and all of a sudden, when your name is at the top of the list, then lo and behold you are the next one there. But the Police Association Victoria wanted a merit-based system that was more open and transparent in the way officers are transferred. That is not a bad thing. It is certainly something that the police association wanted through its EBA negotiations. This bill essentially implements that portion of the EBA agreement.

As far as policing goes, the coalition's record on policing was very strong on policing in the last term, putting on over 1900 additional sworn officers, which is in stark contrast to the present government, which actually now has less sworn officers than in December 2014. There are actually less sworn officers in Victoria than there were roughly a year and a half ago. In my electorate the Waurn Ponds police station is a station that was built by the coalition. In 2010 it was an election commitment. It was not matched by Labor, which had no interest in building a police station in the southern suburbs of Geelong. The coalition built it. Had Labor been elected, there would not have been a police station built there.

Last week I was pleased to take a tour of that police station with the Leader of the Opposition to see that state-of-the-art station and what a fantastic facility it is for the local community. But unfortunately it is understaffed. That police station should have a complement of 32 officers, but there are only approximately 17 on the roster at the moment. That is just over half of the officers that are required. The highway patrol is also based there and has been very happy with the move. But clearly there is an issue. Torquay police station is also in my electorate, and, again, I am hearing stories about how understaffed that police station is. Basically that police station has to cover from Torquay all the way to Lorne, and sometimes there is only one divisional van between Torquay and Lorne covering the Great Ocean Road.

So you have got the township of Torquay with over 15 000 people. If that van is called to an incident in Lorne, it is an hour away. The problem that we are starting to see in my electorate — particularly in suburbs like Highton and Wandana Heights and in Torquay, Jan Juc and also Armstrong Creek — is that crooks know how long the police will take to respond. They know the police are stretched. The police do a terrific job with the resources that they have, but the crooks basically know how long it takes for the police to respond. They know they have got 30 to 40 minutes.

In fact a week and a half ago a couple who live in my neighbourhood were robbed in broad daylight on a Sunday. They went out for Sunday brunch, came back and found the house was completely ransacked. They came knocking on the door to ask if we had heard anything. Fortunately we had not. It was very disconcerting for them to find that situation. It is not the police's fault, because their resources are stretched, but unfortunately it took the police 3 hours to arrive afterwards to have a look at that incident. They do a terrific job, but this is clearly a significant issue.

The same problems are occurring in Torquay, and you are starting to see that in the crime rate. In Torquay, in postcode 3228, the last statistics show we had a 77 per cent increase in crime; in Armstrong Creek, 3217, there was a 50 per cent increase in crime; in the Surf Coast shire overall it was 33 per cent; and in the City of Greater Geelong there was around a 15 per cent increase in crime. These are issues that my community is very upset about. I have people speak to me all the time about this, and I am starting to hear a lot particularly from women who are not feeling safe in their own homes. They are afraid of getting burgled.

Criminals are not only burgling the house but stealing car keys, and then they come back and steal the car at a later date. I have recounted the story previously in the house about Corey Enright, who plays for Geelong, and his wife, Renee, who had that happen to them while they were sleeping in their home in Torquay. This is what is happening. Unfortunately it is usually drug crime, so it is done by people looking to buy drugs or to pay off drug debts. It is a very ordinary situation that we are facing.

One thing that police also have highlighted to me is the ridiculousness of the present pursuit policy. A police officer recounted an instance where the police came up to a set of lights and saw a stolen vehicle in front of them. Obviously the perpetrators inside the car saw the police behind them, and — voomph — they took off through a red light. The police had to stay there; they could not follow. It was quite unwarranted for the poor police, but the people at the intersection were saying, 'Well, what on earth are you doing? What the hell are you doing? Why aren't you chasing these people?'. They were not allowed to. So it is very frustrating for those officers. They need to be able to exercise their judgement. If the situation becomes dangerous, then they can pull the pin, and I fully understand that, but to not pursue a person who is committing a crime under any circumstances is just a completely ridiculous policy to me, and that is what police officers are saying to me. They are very, very frustrated with that pursuit policy.

With regard to the deployment of police, this government certainly has politicised the deployment of police. There is no greater politicisation of that than the Bellarine safety package in which 15 officers have been deployed to the Bellarine Peninsula — which is fine for Drysdale, Portarlington and also Queenscliff. What clearly has happened is that the minister and the Premier through the budget process have decreed that those officers will go to the Bellarine. I have addressed adjournment debate matters to the minister, and the response is basically, 'I don't deploy police; the chief commissioner does'. You cannot have it both ways.

You cannot, for political expediency, say to the chief commissioner, 'Oh, well, in this case, because we made an election commitment, we'll deploy the police and you have to do it', and then every other time when a member stands in this place and says, 'Look, I've got an issue, and we need more police resources', turn around and say, 'Well, don't look at me. I'm just the minister; I don't deploy the police'.

The problem that is happening is that there are no additional police officers being trained, and there are no additional sworn officers, so there is no-one for the Chief Commissioner of Police to deploy in the first place. That is the problem that we are having, and that is something that my community is very frustrated with — in particular, as I said, in Torquay. It is very topical there. A lot of people are very upset. They are sick to death of the burglaries, and they are sick to death of the theft of vehicles. It is a real problem in those areas.

Some of my colleagues have touched on the fact that in the past a lot of now government members whilst in opposition were very vocal about policing issues, probably no-one more than the member for Ivanhoe, who is in the chamber at the moment. Certainly he was very vocal about the West Heidelberg police station. Even these photos of the member and the then opposition leader show that, with 'Open the West Heidelberg police station now'. There is a lovely photo there, with a group of people. I am not sure how many branch members the member for Ivanhoe managed to muster, but he has gone very, very silent now on the West Heidelberg police station.

Mr Brooks interjected.

Mr KATOS — Oh, it has opened, has it?

Mr Brooks interjected.

Mr KATOS — You think so. I do like that from the member for Bundoora. Surely if it has opened the member for Ivanhoe would be standing and making points of order about me.

Mr Brooks interjected.

Mr KATOS — That is fine, but according to the member for Ivanhoe it is closed. This is the sort of hypocrisy that we see: when they were in opposition they wanted the police, but it is not coming into action now. There are no more additional sworn officers in this state.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — I am delighted to make a contribution in relation to the Victoria Police

Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. As previous speakers have indicated, this is an important piece of legislation because it gives effect to the enterprise bargaining agreement between the Police Association Victoria and Victoria Police. Specifically it relates to ensuring that general duties constable and senior constable positions will be filled by a merit-based selection system, particularly in how that relates to country Victoria.

At the outset I do want to place on the record my appreciation for the work that Victoria Police officers perform in our community. Certainly from my perspective as the member for Essendon we have got some fantastic officers who work out of the Flemington police station as well as the Moonee Ponds police station. I want to place on the record my appreciation for the work that Superintendent Mick Hermans performs as our region superintendent. Inspector Geoff Kedge recently left the City of Moonee Valley. He has now gone down to the Latrobe Valley, and he has been promoted to superintendent, so it is fantastic for Kedge. Recently I met with his replacement, Inspector Charmaine Hosking, and I think Charmaine will do a very good job in replacing Geoff. We are very fortunate that Ian Jones is a senior sergeant out at Moonee Ponds and Steve Kehagias is a senior sergeant down at Flemington.

When you get elected to this place as a local member for the first time you start to try to understand who your stakeholders are. You talk to people who are active in your local community. Clearly when you are a member of this place or the other place you have a fair amount to do with members of Victoria Police. Certainly in my community there have been issues in the past. There has been conflict between residents of the public housing estate and officers at Flemington police station.

What was interesting was just the way in which Victoria Police officers responded to that conflict. Their solution was to start to invite into the Flemington police station residents from the public housing estate to have a meal, a morning tea, together.

It did not happen overnight; it happened progressively, but effectively what happened was that the community leaders started to develop an appreciation of some of the trials and tribulations that serving officers of Victoria Police confront on a daily basis. Similarly, I think that from the perspective of those members of Victoria Police, they got an understanding of what life is like living on a public housing estate. As a consequence, a lot of the tension and pressure that had built up previously has lapsed.

This bill is important because it is about making sure that we look at finding a way in which we can try to become more productive. The essence of this bill is that it is about productivity. It is about recognising the fact that we have got to have flexible industrial relations instruments in place in order to increase the productivity of public services. It was a longstanding policy of the former Labor government that enterprise bargaining agreements were negotiated with CPI plus productivity gains. That was a way of recognising that you can get paid more than the CPI rate if you are prepared to trade away some of your conditions to get more money. That is a very sensible approach to industrial relations.

As an aside, I remember speaking with Bunnings. Bunnings came to Victoria in the early 1990s when it bought the old McEwans hardware chain, which was in receivership.

Mr Edbrooke — Really?

Mr PEARSON — Indeed, member for Frankston. It was McEwans. That is how Bunnings started in Victoria. Bunnings realised early on that it would actually sell more hammers on a Saturday and a Sunday than it would on a Tuesday, so it negotiated a deal with the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association. It turned around and said, 'We will give you a higher base wage during the week, Monday to Friday, and we are going to offset that with a lower penalty rate regime on the weekend. And we will give you access to shares over the course of your employment'. As a consequence of those flexible working arrangements we saw the productivity of Bunnings increase significantly, we saw it significantly expand its footprint and it has become a great success story.

Its first big superstore was opened in 1994 in Sunshine. There was a gentleman there who started in 1994 and retired just before the great recession and he was asked, 'What do you want to do with your shares?'. He said 'Look, just sell them' — he had forgotten that he had been allocated shares as part of his employment arrangements. He got a cheque for \$165 000. That is an extraordinary amount of wealth for someone who had basically spent his life, particularly that period of time in his working life, on the shop floor. That is what we are talking about when we talk about having flexible industrial relations mechanisms in place. It is about trying to make sure that we can be more productive and more efficient.

The reality is that at a state level we have finite resources. It is stating the obvious but we have finite

resources. We have a budget of around \$56 billion that we spend and we have been pretty fortunate in the sense that we have been able to produce budget surpluses in the order of about \$1 billion. But the reality is that about 47 per cent of that revenue comes through federal government grants, so we are under pressure when you look at the state of the federal budget and the increasing demand with the population growing at about 1.7 per cent to 1.8 per cent. That therefore means we have to think about ways in which we can become more efficient and more effective, ways that we can be faster, smarter, more nimble and more adept at discharging public services. This bill is important because it gives effect to that. It ensures that we will be in a position where we can be more effective.

The sad reality is that although the Victorian economy has been growing significantly — and it has done so since probably 1991–92 — we have not had an economic contraction in Victoria since 1991–92. What we are seeing, though, is that a lot of that growth is really being driven by population growth and our productivity rate on an individualised per capita basis has actually declined. To some extent this is not really a problem while we keep on having population growth, and the Treasurer referred today to the state final demand figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics which show that we have a significant level of economic growth, which is a very good thing. But the risk is of course that if population growth starts to taper off or it declines, then we will have the double whammy. We will not have the growth being driven by population growth and we are not going to be as economically productive on a per capita basis, which would have a significant impact on the state's finances. From that point of view this is an important piece of legislation.

It is also important to make sure that we try to get the right people for the right situations. The reality is that some of us work well by ourselves, some of us work well in a small work environment and some of us do not. Before coming here I worked in a small business environment for close to 15 years and there were effectively three full-time positions in my organisation — at most it was three — and I quite enjoyed that working environment. I found it was quite dynamic and I had an enormous amount of freedom and flexibility and that is something I really enjoyed. That is not for everyone.

The reality is that not everyone is going to want to work in a single-person police station or a two-person police station. You have got to be careful from a human resources perspective that you do not try to bang a square peg into a round hole. You have to look at it and

ask, 'What sort of person is the right fit to be out there by themselves? Do they have the resilience? Do they have the toughness? Do they have the ability to discharge their duties effectively, or don't they?'. The reality is that it is no reflection on the individuals involved — some people work better in larger groups and some people work better in a big, bureaucratic, large organisation. Some of us work better out on our own doing our own thing. It is horses for courses. This bill is important because it gives effect to that.

It is always welcome and refreshing when you have responsible trade union leadership working with organisations that are prepared to engage, be nimble and be flexible. I note that the member for Macedon is in the chamber and I had a lot to do with her husband, Graham Kent, when he was with the Police Association Victoria. He was an outstanding individual, he was very responsible and he was very smart. He had the ability to be flexible and to be quite open and engaging. This is an important piece of legislation, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ms RYALL (Ringwood) — I rise to make a contribution to the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016 and to state from the outset that we do not oppose this bill. This bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013 to enable merit-based transfers rather than transfers based on the waiting list approach to positions for those who are below the rank of sergeant. Previously those below the rank of sergeant had to wait until their name reached the top of the list, whereas those of the rank of sergeant and above were able to be transferred on a basis of merit. So it provides that equivalence in a sense, and it also provides greater transparency on appointments whilst providing for the right of appeal. It enables a spread of skills, if you like, across the state based on merit, based on qualifications and based on choosing the best person for the job.

I wanted to highlight a media release by the Minister for Police, dated 15 April 2015, in which he referred to not closing police stations. The release clearly states:

This government does not support the forcible closure of police stations against the wishes of local communities.

In my local community the Nunawading police station has been closed to the public. This has been done very sneakily in that no one was consulted about it and nobody has, from a household perspective, been specifically notified of its closure. My community includes the Donvale, Nunawading, Blackburn North and Mitcham regions. Whilst many on the Labor side will say that the Forest Hill police station was built, it was built in addition to the Nunawading police station, not in place of it.

The issue that I highlight most of all is the failure to consult. There was a rock-hard commitment by the government that it would not close these police stations without consulting the community, and that rock-hard commitment is not rock hard. It clearly was never meant to be rock hard, and therefore the government has closed the Nunawading police station. It has failed to fulfil its promise and its commitment to consult with the community — not only that, but the government has not even notified the community. These issues obviously have been raised with me by members of my local community. Certainly an instance was highlighted to me of a disabled person who had had a wallet stolen. That person made their way to the police station, only to find that it was closed. Another person had an incident on a nearby road and drove straight to the police station, only to find it was closed.

It is one thing to not consult the community; it is another thing to not even tell them that a station has been closed. As far as I am concerned that is a breach of respect of the members of my community, and it shows absolute contempt for them. The government has broken its promise and refuses to even talk about it in that respect. Police numbers per capita have been cut. When Labor was last in office it ran down the police service. We had the lowest per capita spend of any of the mainland states. I well recall when those opposite were in opposition screaming that under them crime had gone down. Crime was down because there was not the required number of police officers to be able to detect the crimes and report them. When you are spending the lowest per capita of the mainland states on police and you try to say — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms RYALL — Aren't they defensive? When you try to say that the statistics are going in the right direction while your spend per capita on police is going absolutely south, then we have got a problem. What we have seen now is probably an attempt to do this again. It is an attempt to not deal with attrition and not deal with population growth. We heard the auditioning Treasurer in his contribution talk about population growth. If your population is growing, you would expect that police numbers need to grow in accordance with the population growth.

Mr Pearson — Not necessarily.

Ms RYALL — Not necessarily, he says! It is kind of interesting, especially when we have got the levels of family violence, the levels of drugs, the increased threat of terrorism and the requirement for police to work two-up in pairs. It beggars belief, the suggestion that we

do not need more police officers. I was recently having a conversation with a police officer, who said, 'If only Victorians knew how poor the resourcing was for police officers' — that is, for them personally in terms of the numbers. Those opposite can sing from the rooftops and say it is not so, but it does not make their lies become truths just by saying it.

It was interesting before because the member for Ivanhoe was mentioned. Certainly in the last term of government — for the information of new members — he absolutely screamed from the rooftops about his West Heidelberg police station. We all remember it so well. With his booming voice he would yell out, 'Where's my police station?'. I remember him ringing Jon Faine's morning program. He did not declare who he was. He rang up while the former police minister was on the program, and he asked about his West Heidelberg police station. Funnily enough, he was called out. The police minister at that time said, 'I know who you are', and sure enough, he was outed as being the member for Ivanhoe demanding the opening of his West Heidelberg police station. The funny thing was he had his Facebook page with all of his cronies out there.

The member for Bundoora just said a few minutes ago that the West Heidelberg police station is open. The member for Ivanhoe did not say a word. He just smiled and nodded his head a little bit. Interestingly enough, if you Google 'West Heidelberg police station', it says it is permanently closed. For all of the bluster and the bluff of those opposite, they are confused. We have got per capita of population cuts in the number of police officers, and we have got a failure to invest in the level and number of police officers that are actually needed according to our population.

We have got former opposition members wanting police stations to open and the government saying they are open when in fact they are closed. We have got a government that promised to consult on any closures or any changes with communities and has failed to do so. We have seen closures all over the place. There is a failure to consult the community and there is a failure to even let them know what is happening. You get a sign on the door — and that is simply not good enough. That is not respect. That is not treating people in the community with respect on an important issue to them — that is, their safety, the safety of their community and their personal safety.

When people want to know what is going on in their community with their police, to not be consulted, to not be informed of what is happening and to not be given any say on the decision, as my community has not been given on the closure to the public of the Nunawading

police station, is to be absolutely held in contempt. I call on the Acting Minister for Police to get out there and make sure that every household knows that this government has failed to consult and to inform them that it has closed the Nunawading police station and to actually give them a say in what has happened. It is about time for those opposite to just stop assuming that whatever they believe and whatever they do is right for Victorians and actually start having a conversation with them and making sure that people get some say in their community, get some say in their state and get some respect shown to them for the will of the people. It is about time the Premier and this government actually started to listen to the people of Victoria.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) — It is indeed my pleasure to rise today to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. In doing so I want to take the opportunity, given that it was International Women's Day yesterday, to reflect on some of the much-needed changes that we have seen in Victoria Police but also to comment on some serious work that still needs to be done and then to talk about how the bill is one small step in progressing some of this work.

Back in 2001 the Bracks Labor government made the very significant decision to appoint the first woman as Chief Commissioner of Police, Christine Nixon. I want to reflect on the great leadership of Christine Nixon at Victoria Police and the transformation of police culture under her watch. I was having a look at some of the data on the proportion of women that have been employed as sworn officers in Victoria Police, and I wanted to use a 10-year period to look at some of the changes that have taken place.

In 2005, 16.5 per cent of all sworn officers were women, and by June 2015 that had increased to 25.14. That is a big increase, but it is not enough. No way is this enough. I do want to point out that this was something that Christine Nixon was very deliberate about. She made no bones about her desire to see more women being recruited to Victoria Police, and there is a really important reason for this. It is very important that we have women being recruited to and the proportion of women grown in all of our key service delivery agencies, because when we see more women in areas like policing, the Country Fire Authority, the State Emergency Service and Ambulance Victoria and all of the emergency services, what we see is a greater understanding and responsiveness to some of the issues that are of real concern to women. There is no better example of this than the focus that was driven by Christine Nixon on uncovering and treating seriously the scourge of family violence here in Victoria.

It will be a great legacy of Christine Nixon's leadership that she, for the first time, got Victoria Police to take seriously the issue of homicide occurring in our homes. Homicide that was occurring in our homes was too often passed over as 'just a domestic', a matter for the private sphere only. There came an understanding that for every homicide of a woman there were countless thousands of assaults and abuses of women and children that went unreported, or indeed if they were reported they were given cursory attention by Victoria Police.

I have to say it has been fantastic to see that this leadership that was shown firstly by Christine Nixon has continued with Ken Lay, another great champion, and now we see Graham Ashton continuing to do the hard work to make sure that our fantastic police service — because it is a great police service — does what is required to keep women and children in this state safe. It was fantastic to see, and very moving, in Parliament last year our now chief commissioner, Graham Ashton, join with Rosie Batty, Kristy McKellar and others on that extraordinary day that I am sure none of us will ever forget.

A lot has been done in Victoria Police to ensure that more women continue to be recruited to Victoria Police. In doing so that means that Victoria Police is better able to respond to the needs of women in our community, but the key challenge that now faces Victoria Police is to keep policewomen safe in Victoria Police itself. It is not enough to recruit the women; it is not enough to attract them there. We must retain them, and in order to do that we must ensure that they have a safe workplace.

Through her fantastic work our former equal opportunity commissioner, Kate Jenkins, who I am delighted has been appointed as the federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, shone a light on the dark side of police culture, and we saw that too many women, too many policewomen, have been subject to abuses of power and sexual harassment in their workplaces. I am very pleased that this matter is being taken extremely seriously by the chief commissioner and that there is a commitment by Victoria Police to act on all the recommendations of the report. I am very pleased also that Police Association Victoria has similarly taken very seriously the recommendations of this report and is working cooperatively with police command on implementing the recommendations.

The bill, as I said, takes a small step towards changing some of the work practices and culture at Victoria Police to ensure that it is a workplace that respects all the people who work within it and that it makes

appointments to ensure that the best person is given the job each and every time. I note the contribution made by the member for Essendon, particularly about ensuring that when considering the best person to perform the job we take into account the context in which they are working as well. Certainly single-member police work is not for everyone, and it is important that selection for those types of roles is through a merit-based system.

As we have heard, the bill before the house allows the current merit-based transfer provisions in the Victoria Police Act 2013, including appeal rights, to apply to transfers to general duties country positions. These provisions are currently used to transfer and promote police officers to sergeant, senior sergeant and inspector positions, and consistent with these current provisions the bill has the effect that transfers to country positions will proceed as follows: the chief commissioner has regard to the relative merit of each candidate. Where a merit-based process determines that candidates have equal merit, the chief commissioner must have regard to seniority. Unsuccessful candidates may appeal to the Police Registration and Services Board (PRSB). The appeal proceeds as a rehearing of the relative merits of the candidates, and the PRSB's decision is binding on the chief commissioner and subject to judicial review by the Supreme Court.

I would like to finish my contribution on the bill today by acknowledging the very fine work of Inspector Ryan Irwin in the Macedon police services area. I work with Ryan very closely on many occasions. He is leading the charge in my electorate against family violence in the work he is doing through our community safety committee. He is at the forefront of work to tackle the problem of ice in the community of Macedon through an ice action task force and in assisting to convene an ice forum and develop an action plan. He has joined with others in the community, including me, members of local council and members of the Centre for Non-Violence out of Bendigo, which services the Macedon Ranges, and Cobaw Community Health centre in championing the need for Court Services Victoria to prioritise the Kyneton courthouse and to ensure that it is made safe for the women victims of family violence and for those who work with and support those women.

On that note again I commend Victoria Police officers for the excellent work they do, not only in my electorate but across the state, in keeping Victorians safe. This is a very good bill, and I commend it to the house.

Mr WATT (Burwood) — I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. To start my contribution I want to refer to a media release from the Minister for Police, who is also the Minister for Corrections. That statement of 15 April 2015 by the police minister states:

As Minister for Police, I made a commitment in Parliament in February that this would keep all existing police stations open.

This government —

being the Andrews Labor government —

does not support the forcible closure of police stations against the wishes of local communities. There are 329 police stations across the state and they all play a significant role in the work done by police.

It is a nice media release; if only it were true. In my electorate when we are talking about ‘merit based’ I would say that when the chief of staff to the current police minister actually makes a report — —

Mr McGuire — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is being irrelevant to the bill. He is now talking about staffers, and he needs to be brought back to the bill.

Ms Ryan — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member has been speaking for just over a minute. He has been referring to the merit-based requirements of the bill. I ask that you rule the point of order raised by the member for Broadmeadows out of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! I say to the member for Broadmeadows that it has been a wideranging debate. It is a very broad bill. I will endeavour to listen to the member for Burwood, but I will rule the point of order out of order at the moment.

Mr WATT — Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. I refer to the chief of staff to the police minister, who actually said — and funnily enough he used to be the member for Burwood — that the Ashburton area has an 80 per cent higher crime rate than the rest of Boroondara. He also stated in a report that Ashburton has a 26 per cent higher crime rate than the state average. It is interesting that the chief of staff to the police minister puts this in a report. He spoke to me some three years ago about policing and presented me with a petition. That particular petition was about opening the Ashburton police station — —

Mr McGuire — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member for Burwood has gone totally against your advice to him. He is not

actually going to this bill in any way, shape or form, and I ask you on a point of relevance to bring him back to the bill.

Mr WATT — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I refer to the member for Macedon, who talked in a quite wideranging way on the bill. She talked about family violence. I am not sure that the bill actually talks about family violence. The member for Ringwood actually talked a lot about the Mitcham police station, which was cut by this government. I am leading in the same direction as the member for Ringwood, who was not ruled out of order. I am simply talking about the fact that the chief of staff to the police minister, as the former member for Burwood, petitioned his own government to open the Ashburton police station. He also gave me a petition in 2013 to tell me that he wanted me to have the police station opened, only a month before the station was opened by the then police minister.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — On the point of order.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr WATT — I would say that I am being very relevant to the bill when the chief of staff to the police minister, in this nice little picture —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — I ask the member for Burwood — —

Mr WATT — is handing me a petition to reopen the Ashburton police station, and currently —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — I ask the member for Burwood to take his seat!

Mr WATT — the Ashburton police station is closed. It is only open two day shifts a week. It is a disgrace!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! The member for Burwood will take his seat!

Ms D’Ambrosio — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, clearly the house is almost without control, and I would strongly recommend that in the short time that is remaining on such an important bill the member be brought back to debating the bill, and he should do so without further delay.

Mr Burgess — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I was not here for this particular contribution, but I can tell you that I have been sitting here and

listening across various contributions that have been very, very broad. Virtually if the word ‘police’ was used in them, that was enough to bring it in.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr Burgess — If we could get some more respect from some of the members who just sit there yelling all the time, we could perhaps get on with this debate.

Ms Couzens — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this bill is about regional police, not metropolitan police.

Mr Ryan — Further on the point of order, Acting Speaker, I do support the member for Burwood when he reflects on the contributions of those on the other side of the house who have clearly canvassed options very broadly around the subject of police, as the member for Burwood was doing. I would ask that you rule this out of order. The conditions at the Ashburton police station do go to the broader conditions around Victoria Police and the conditions that it is operating in, and it is just as relevant as many of the issues canvassed by those on the opposite side of the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. I will overrule the point of order at this stage again. I will encourage the member for Burwood to continue to focus on the bill about merit-based transfers. I will say that there has been very wideranging debate, yesterday and today, but I ask the member to make his comments more pointed towards the bill in the limited time that he has available.

Mr WATT — I am happy to do that, Acting Speaker. My constituency is asking about merit-based transfers. My constituency is asking about that. What my constituency is asking is — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! Give the member for Burwood a chance.

Mr WATT — The chief of staff to the current Minister for Police was asking three years ago about merit-based transfers. What he was saying was: what is the merit in closing down the Ashburton police station when Ashburton has a 26 percent higher crime rate than the rest of the state? What is the point? Where is the merit in actually removing police from Ashburton and Burwood? Where is the merit in — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! I ask the member for Burwood to sit down.

Ms Thomas — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I refer to relevance. This bill refers to merit-based transfers of police in regional Victoria, not in Ashburton. It has nothing to do with Ashburton, and the member over there is abusing his opportunity here. I ask you to rule him out of order and bring him back to speaking on the bill and to demonstrate some linkage or understanding of the bill and the issues as they relate to regional Victoria.

Mr WATT — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the bill has ‘merit-based transfer’ in its title. I am talking about the merit of transferring police out of Ashburton and transferring police out of Burwood. The chief of staff to the current police minister did not agree when he was not the chief of staff. The merit of moving police out of Ashburton, closing the police station in Burwood, having the police station graffitied, as reported on Channel 9 only a couple of months ago — there is no merit in having a police station closed or having the Ashburton police station downgraded to — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! I ask the member for Burwood to take his seat. I have heard enough on the point of order. I uphold the point of order, and I ask the member for Burwood in the limited time he has available to him to come back to the bill and speak about the bill.

Mr WATT — I am speaking on the bill and on the merits of transferring police. That is what the bill is about. If I want to talk about the merits of transferring police, we should put it in the context of the overall police numbers and the fact that we actually have less police in Victoria today than we did in 2014 at the election — less police! This has an effect on the transfer of police, particularly police being transferred out of my electorate and into other electorates. The fact that the chief of staff to the police minister presented a petition — the then shadow Minister for Police put a petition to this Parliament — calling on the Ashburton police station to be re-staffed and that this government then changed it from being open seven days a week down to being open two day shifts a week is a disgrace — and I have to tell you that my community does not like it one single bit.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! I ask the member for Burwood to take a seat.

Mr WATT — They will not stand for it! Where are their police? Why do we not have police in Ashburton?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! The member for Burwood will take his seat!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WATT — Why do we not have protective services officers on our train — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! The member for Broadmeadows on a point of order.

Mr Burgess — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Melton just called the member for Burwood a ‘fool’. I think we have had this ruled on in this house only recently by you, Acting Speaker. That sort of language should offend everybody. The member for Melton is better than that, and he should not be yelling that sort of language out across this house.

Mr McGuire — Just for the record, Acting Speaker, I actually had the call. The member for Hastings did not have the call.

On a point of order on relevance and on the member for Burwood’s absolute defiance all the way through of your ruling, I call on that to be addressed by the Speaker. He totally defied the ruling of the Chair.

Mr WATT — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I would ask that you ask the Deputy Speaker to withdraw the comment he made.

Mr Nardella — I withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McCurdy) — Order! The member for Melton has withdrawn.

Sitting suspended 1.01 p.m. until 2.01 p.m.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Water policy

The SPEAKER — Order! I have accepted a statement from the member for Murray Plains proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house condemns the Andrews Labor government for its desalination plant announcement which deceives Victorians by claiming it will solve water shortage issues in country Victoria when it is impossible to deliver desalinated water to those areas, and further notes that the recent water announcements will lead to increases in water bills and cost-of-living pressures for Victorian families.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) — The nub of this issue is that the Andrews government is exploiting the vulnerability of country communities as an excuse to turn on the desalination plant.

As many people would know — and for those on the other side of the house who do not know — there is a critical water shortage issue in many parts of country Victoria. Those regions are severely impacted by drought and do have a critical water shortage. Some people who actually thought that they did have a secure stock and domestic supply because of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline are now impacted by the blue-green algae that is coming down the Murray River in particular. Even some that thought that they — —

Ms Neville interjected.

Mr WALSH — It has in some areas. It has affected it over time, so those people who thought they had a secure supply have been affected over that particular time. The fact that there is a Wimmera–Mallee pipeline means that quite a few people have had a secure stock and domestic supply. I think for that project we particularly need to thank John Forrest, a former federal member for Mallee who is known as Mr Pipeline and who spent his career from 1992 to when he retired two years ago to making sure that project was actually brought to fruition. In the early days John Anderson as Deputy Prime Minister and John Howard as the Prime Minister made sure the federal funding was there to get that particular project done. So let us not be deceived in the rewriting of history by some on the other side of the house that the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline project was their project, because it was not. The key person, the common denominator through this whole project, was John Forrest because of what he was able to deliver for that particular area.

Right at the moment there are extensions that have been built or are being built at Pella in the north-west, north-east of Quambatook at what was called Bael Bael and in other areas. These extensions were planned when we were in government. They were actually funded with money that was left over from the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline project because that project was delivered so efficiently over that particular time. If you think about the recent announcements about the potential for an area around Woosang and around Buckrabanyule being extended, again that work was done while we were in government, and the current water minister, to her credit, is continuing that good work.

The area that is really badly impacted by drought at the moment and a shortage of water supply is around that greater region of Wedderburn. The minister is very well aware of that, and this side of the house can only encourage the minister to get on with it and do that particular project. I know there is a lot of goodwill and a lot of work being done by the locals to make sure that

project actually comes to fruition, so I encourage the minister to make sure that project actually gets done as soon as possible, because those people have been carting water for a number of years and they desperately need something to be done.

A number of the speakers on this side of the house will go into more detail about their specific areas in relation to this matter of public importance and explain how the desalination water is not going to be able to help the people in their particular area. I suppose what I have noticed in the vernacular being used and the story being developed by the Andrews Labor government over the last 15 months is that it has been saying, 'We have to have a reason to turn on the desalination plant. We have to effectively have a manufactured crisis'. That has been around some of the issues in country Victoria.

I refer to reports in the *Age* newspaper in, I think, last October, where the story was effectively about how the Glenelg and the Wimmera rivers were going to run dry because of the dry conditions and we needed to turn the desalination plant on. Can I give the minister a short geography lesson? It is about 460 kilometres from Wonthaggi to the head of those two rivers, and there are several mountain ranges in between, so it is physically impossible — anything is possible with enough money; but within reasonable expense it is impossible — to pipe that water over into those particular rivers. So we have had this story being developed about how we have to turn the desalination plant on to solve real issues for country Victorians who have not got water.

Then on Sunday we awoke to the press release that Melbourne has a critical water issue. Melbourne's storages are at 63-point-something per cent — nearly two-thirds full. If you actually go to the Melbourne Water website and look at its water reserve chart, you will see that we are well and truly in the secure area for Melbourne water. The minister tried to mislead the house yesterday, saying that Melbourne water was actually in the medium level — —

Ms Neville interjected.

Mr WALSH — Well, read *Hansard*. We are actually 10 per cent above the trigger point to go back into the medium level. Melbourne's water storages are at 63-point-something per cent, nearly two-thirds full.

For the benefit of those in the house who have not read about the history of our water supply, our forefathers actually built reservoirs so that they could capture water in the winter and the spring and then use it in the summer and the autumn. That is how the reservoirs work, and the reservoirs usually go down over summer

and autumn. That has happened since man started building dams, so there is no surprise that the Melbourne storages have gone down over summer. Again, if you go to Melbourne Water's website, you will see there is five years supply in the Melbourne storages. That is on the Melbourne Water website.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WALSH — Members should go and read the information that is on the website. There is five years supply of water there for Melbourne. However, there is not that sort of supply for some areas in country Victoria. Those people are suffering badly, but they cannot get that particular water. This is a manufactured water crisis. It will have an impact on cost-of-living pressures, particularly for Melbourne water customers, because not only have they had to pay the \$1.8 million per day for the desalination plant to sit there but they are now also going to have to pay the consumptive charge of actually getting that water produced. That, I might add, is providing the powerline actually works.

Those people that read the *Herald Sun* today would be wondering why the government actually made an announcement on Sunday that it was going to turn the desalination plant on. You pick up the *Herald Sun* today and it says that the people who operate the desalination plant are actually having to rely on diesel generators for the desalination plant while the powerline is turned off and being repaired. It just defies logic to me as to why that particular announcement would be made.

If you think about the announcement that was made on Sunday about where people are going to benefit from water from the desalination plant, yes, Barwon Water customers did pay to have the Melbourne–Geelong connector built — something like \$140 million for that particular project — but they have been quarantined from Melbourne pool prices until they actually start taking water down that pipeline. So for those customers of Barwon Water, once they start taking water out of the Melbourne pool the prices that Barwon Water pays will actually go up.

If you think about the numbers that are being used in relation to the Barwon Water storages, Barwon Water actually has access to the Barwon Downs and the Anglesea bore field. That is what kept it going through the drought. That has not been factored into the press release that the government has been putting out. The government has also said in an announcement that water from the Lal Lal Reservoir will now go to Ballarat in totality and Barwon Water will be able to get water out of the Melbourne pool.

What the government has conveniently forgotten is that Central Highlands Water customers actually paid to build the goldfields super-pipe, which was also a supply of water for Ballarat.

Ms Neville interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water will have her opportunity shortly.

Mr WALSH — We are finding a duplication of projects. Yes, there is a need for water pipelines in certain places, but there is a need to be prudent as to how money is invested because ultimately it will have impact on people's water bills. Through the years of the last Labor government, you saw Melbourne water bills go from a bit over \$500 per year to nearly \$1200 per year. I believe that this is the start of a significant increase in water bills again because this Andrews government does not care about cost-of-living pressures for people when it comes to their bills and how it has got its hands in people's wallets into the future.

I really am concerned that the government is using the drought as an excuse to turn on the desalination plant. It is exploiting the vulnerability of our country communities. We heard comments from the Minister for Education yesterday about the need for sporting ovals and school playgrounds. I absolutely agree with that. They are absolutely essential to the livability of our communities, but the desalination plant is not going to put water into a lot of those communities. Those that do have access to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline and will have access to extensions when they are done in the future will have access to water. However, there are communities that do not have access to pipelines and may not have access to pipelines in the future but which will need help into the future. There are opportunities with groundwater to help those particular communities.

Through this whole process I have found it interesting that there has been absolute silence from that side of the house when it comes to water use efficiency, when it comes to re-use water, when it comes to using stormwater or any of those things that we talked about as a government, anything that we funded out of the Living Victoria Fund, all those great water projects, particularly in Melbourne, that took the pressures off the storages for drinking water. I cannot recall one announcement of one project that has actually been instigated by this government around those sorts of projects that was not actually started or planned or developed under our government. Because we had a real commitment to water use efficiency, to recycling water, to the use of stormwater into the future.

Ms Neville — How about the Ballarat project? How did that go?

Mr WALSH — The Living Ballarat project is actually going very well. I pick up the interjection from the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. The aquifer recharge, the Cardigan aquifer, is actually going on now. We are actually harvesting stormwater which is being stored underground to bring back out again. It was something that Labor would not ever consider in its term in government. It took the coalition to come to government to actually put re-use, recycling and stormwater harvesting on the radar to happen. I would hope that the minister has enough common sense to bury her prejudices against these sorts of projects and actually do something into the future.

To finish off, as I said, a number of the speakers on this side will talk about their particular areas and the deceit of this government in claiming that turning the desalination plant on will solve the water issues in their particular parts of Victoria. It will not do that. You cannot take desalination plant water to the head of the Wimmera River. You cannot take desalination plant water to the head of the Glenelg River. You cannot take desalination plant water to some of the people in the member for Ripon's seat, where it is just physically impossible to do that.

I would urge the government to actually come clean, to say this is about justification of a white elephant project that was done under the previous Labor government. I thought the cartoon in the *Herald Sun* the day before yesterday, with the Premier pulling on the tail of a big white elephant who was slowly waking up and saying, 'I don't get out of bed for anything under \$600 million a year', was probably one of the best cartoons I have seen in the *Herald Sun*, and there have been some doozies over the years. That cartoon said it all about the desalination plant.

To finish off, there are people doing it very tough in country Victoria through a lack of water supply, and we need a continuation from this government of the very good work that was done by previous conservative governments, both state and federal, to build the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline project.

Ms Neville — That was us, thank you very much. John Brumby, thank you.

Mr WALSH — It was not you. It was John Forrest, John Anderson and John Howard who put the majority of water into that project. Some people are very good at trying to rewrite history. Unfortunately country people just do not believe that because they know who actually

does the real work to get things done for their communities, and I condemn the government for the announcement it made on Sunday.

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water) — I again feel the need to start with a really clear view about water. Water security is absolutely critical to our livability, to our economy and to jobs in our community. Whether it is in Melbourne, whether it is in Horsham or whether it is in Shepparton, water security is absolutely central to future population growth, economic growth, jobs and of course livability.

The other thing I need to point out is that there are two strategies when it comes to water security. One is: how do you reduce consumption? What do we need to do to reduce consumption? That is a mix of strategies. There is the reintroduction of Target 155, which those opposite got rid of. It is a mix of utilising recycled water and stormwater. For example, there is the Sunbury recycled water plant. I announced \$53 million for that plant just recently. There was the Yarra Valley Water decision to build a sewage treatment plant at Wallan to enable delivery of recycled water to Wallan and Beveridge. There is the South East Water approval of the Aquarevo project, which is all about making sure that our private development has stormwater recycling capacity. These are really important things. But guess what — we currently do not drink recycled water and we currently do not drink stormwater. We just do not. They are not a replacement for potable water. We are reducing consumption, but on the other side we need to secure a reasonable amount of water to create confidence in our community and to ensure we have the livability that we need.

This is an extraordinary matter of public importance, because again the only people who seem to think that somehow water from the desalination plant is going to Wimmera or that we are suggesting that that happen are those opposite. I do not recall anyone ever saying that at all. What those opposite do not understand is the concept of a water grid and how you optimise that water grid to get the best possible outcomes for communities right across Victoria.

Let us just reflect: we have exceptionally dry conditions, and we have communities that have the lowest inflows they have ever seen. That includes Melbourne, where we are seeing stream inflows into Melbourne storages below that of the millennium drought and below the 30-year average. So we have a significant issue with rainfall levels and inflow levels because it is so dry, not just in Horsham, Stawell, Ararat, Shepparton, the Murray River area, Ballarat and Geelong, but also in Melbourne. These are significant

and serious issues in terms of our potable water storages.

Yes, we have to continue to reduce our consumption over time, but we are delivering that 50 gigalitres of water on the advice of Melbourne water authorities, on the advice of the Bureau of Meteorology and following consideration of all of the information that has been provided. Going to stage 4 water restrictions only delivers 40 gigalitres. Stage 4 restrictions mean that there would be no watering outside at all — none at all, except through buckets. We are contemplating the seniors in our community. This happened in the last drought: people had buckets under the shower, and they were lifting the buckets up and taking them to the garden. Stage 4 restrictions would also mean that no sporting grounds would be watered. Again, they would not deliver the 50 gigalitres we require.

Let us reflect on what we have done in terms of the water grid. Let us be really clear: our priority last time we were in government and our priority this time has been about how we support rural and regional communities to secure their water supplies. How do we do that? That is why we built the goldfields super-pipe — the goldfields super-pipe that those opposite opposed. Without that, Ballarat and Bendigo would be running out of water right now.

We did build the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. It was Labor that led that project, and, yes, eventually John Howard came to the table; I was in this Parliament at the time as well. We built the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, which has made a significant difference in so many communities in that area. However, it still remains an isolated part of our water grid, and we need to do something about that.

We also led the food bowl modernisation project, a project that those opposite pretty much set up to fail when they moved it back into Goulburn–Murray Water. It was an incredible project that is all about saving water for productive and environmental purposes. We built the connector between Geelong and Melbourne, and as members can tell from the way the former minister, the member for Murray Plains, expressed it, that is something those opposite did not support. Again, Geelong will be in a very difficult position. It is going to order 6 gigalitres over the next 12 months, but in addition to that, it is going to tap into its bore water and groundwater; it has to do that in order to meet its 38 per cent target. Again, there is population growth and greater consumption in that region. We need the interconnector, but we also need our other sources of water.

Let us see what else we are investing in. We invested in the Newlands Reservoir interconnector and the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline extensions. We have done that since we have been in government. None of these investments happened under the four years of the former water minister, who supposedly, along with The Nationals, was standing up for regional Victoria. Let us consider Wedderburn. One of the first things I did as Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water was approve the money for the business case for Wedderburn, to connect Wedderburn into the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. I have been up there three or four times, talking to the community of Wedderburn. The former minister completely ignored it, and he is now saying we should speed it up. We are getting on with the job, and I will be making some further comments now that we have the business case not only to connect Wedderburn to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline but also to potentially connect it into the broader grid network.

We have provided additional works for the Sunraysia irrigation project. We are now seeing 91 per cent of the Red Cliffs community irrigators having access to that pipeline. Colac is being connected into Geelong again. That is providing water security for Colac. Additional water is being provided to Werribee and Bacchus Marsh irrigators. We have other extensions to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline — Quambatook and Pella. Again the former minister is trying to claim responsibility for these projects. I can tell members that he did not do them. I provided the resources to do that extension.

We have also announced the extension of the South West Loddon rural water supply extension, which is an additional 40 kilometres of pipe. We have provided 11 new standpipes to provide support for those most drought affected, and we are in the process of doing three more, including at Edenhope and Harrow. We have provided \$300 000 to do the balancing storage at Lake Bolac; we have provided \$120 000 for Elmhurst to mitigate water quality risk; and we have put a number of projects to the commonwealth government, seeking support. Hopefully we might get some support for some regional water projects finally from those opposite for things like the Toolondo to Lake Fyans transfer pipe. There is the recycled water irrigation near Bacchus Marsh — we want to do a project there. There is the Mitiamo domestic and stock project. These are all in with the commonwealth government. Again, there is silence from those opposite. They have said we are manufacturing a crisis.

We have been getting on with the job of supporting rural and regional communities. In fact today we made

some further announcements, which include getting water into the Donald Weir. I can tell members, from having been up there talking to the community in Donald, they want water in their weir. There is the Jeparit Weir and the Green Lake project, which we are looking at again. I made announcements about that. There is the Donald and Charlton water infrastructure at their recreational reserve, and of course we are providing support for school grounds for community sport, to be able to keep those grounds green during the drought in the community.

But, as I said, Melbourne itself has a growing population, and we are having some of the lowest stream inflows we have ever seen in Melbourne, making our storages drop day by day. Weeks like this increase consumption as well as drying out our land even further, making it almost essential that we have massive amounts of rain to get anything in our storages. That is what we are seeing. Even during the summer period, during those storm periods, very little run-off went into our storage system. We are in a difficult position right across Victoria, including in Melbourne.

In the millennium drought what we saw on average coming into our storages was around 376 gegalitres. Last year we got 302 gegalitres, and we are outpacing that in consumption, so we have to do something, and that is what the advice was. That is what the advice was from our Melbourne water authorities. That is what the advice was from the Bureau of Meteorology in terms of its projections on rainfall levels, and even if we get above average rainfall over this winter and autumn period — let us hope we do — it will not make a dent in our storages. It will just not turn this around. This is about a buffer for Melburnians, for Victorians, to ensure that we have got a livable community and that our economy stays strong.

This is going to cost \$12 a year per household, and I know that every dollar matters for families. This is the price that has been set by the Essential Services Commission, \$12 a year. It is the same as the Barwon pricing, which sees no increase. But I can tell members that the cost of doing nothing is much greater, because the cost of water restrictions throughout the millennium drought was put at somewhere between \$450 million and \$1.2 billion by the Productivity Commission. That was the cost of the closure of businesses, the loss of jobs and the loss of livability. These are significant impacts if you go down the path of water restrictions.

Now, with climate change and population growth, it is possible as we move forward that we will need more than this buffer over time, and that may require further restrictions. This is not about punishing people. This is

about making sure that we are able to continue to be the most livable city in the world and that we can continue to have a vibrant and robust economy. That is what responsible governments do; they follow advice, and 50 gegalitres is a responsible, balanced approach. It is about introducing a reduction on consumption through Target 155 and the continuing rollout of our stormwater and recycle projects while increasing our storage levels.

The other thing to note about the 50 gegalitres, for those interested in economic growth, is that it equates to being able to service an additional 320 000 households. So as Melbourne grows we need to increase our water supplies. I know that the former minister for water and apparently the member for South Barwon believe you can make it rain or not rain, but that is just not the case. As I quoted yesterday to this house, the Prime Minister of Australia — —

Mr Katos interjected.

Ms NEVILLE — Speaker, I am astounded by how little people who yell out know about water. Perhaps spend a bit of time — there are triggers for water restrictions, but, as I said, water restrictions cost jobs, and they have not reached those targets. They cost jobs, so if the member for South Barwon is happy to stand up and see the Geelong economy go backwards, even further than the previous government sent it, then I am very happy for him to stand up and say that.

Water security is absolutely critical. We do not need to punish people. If people recall, the desalination plant was built to provide a non-rainfall-dependent source, because climate change is real. Perth in fact relies completely on two desalination plants. If Perth did not have them, it would be in a position where it would not have water in that city. We have built an insurance policy for our city. We are calling on that insurance policy, based on the best possible advice, and that is all about ensuring that we have a strong economy, we keep the jobs and we ensure our livability.

As I started with, our main priority since being elected has been about extending the grid across regional Victoria and supporting regional communities that are doing it tough. We can do more than one thing at once. It is not just about Melbourne; it is about our regional communities. We are getting on with the job of supporting and providing water security in the whole range of communities right across Victoria, including Melbourne, but most importantly in some of our regional and rural communities that have been doing it very, very tough.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) — I rise today to speak on this matter of public importance, and I do so with a heavy heart. Following the minister, I have to say there is a level of dishonesty on display here from the minister, because of course what she is trying to do is to link the turning on of the desalination plant, which is only for Melbourne, with the kind of drought-declared communities that I find in Ripon. Of the 11 drought-declared communities across Victoria I have got 6 — 6 of them are local government authorities in Ripon — and the heart of the drought of course goes to Wedderburn. Once again we see the minister taking some credit here for what is going on in Wedderburn, and there is a study to create a pipeline into Wedderburn, but who paid for that? Well, that would be the water companies. I have yet to see money put into these communities by the government, and again the standpipe issue came out of the water companies. It is about time, as we move to getting this important report on extending the pipeline to Wedderburn, that the government actually steps up with the money. It is not going to be a small amount of money, but it is a necessary amount of money.

My community of Wedderburn has now had farmers carting water for three years. For three years they have been carting water to keep their stock alive, and getting on with this pipeline cannot be delayed anymore. They are paying \$350 for a semitrailer load of water, and some of them, as I said, have carted more than 80 semitrailer loads. That is all they do. They come home, get the water and then go and get another load to keep their stock going. Of course it is not just the farmers who are suffering from this, the whole community is. If we talk about the Wedderburn Development Association and its president, Leigh Randall — a great guy who runs the local supermarket in Wedderburn — we find they are also tightening their belts. They are the largest employer of teenagers in Wedderburn, and yet reducing their hours is their only option when faced with the continuing drought. And yet what we see from this government is, 'Well, we'll turn on the desalination plant; we'll turn that on'. How is that going to help Wedderburn?

The minister talks quite a lot about the water grid. I have here a map of the Victorian water grid. The minister should know that there is just this small problem. This side of the state — the eastern side of the state — is not linked to the western side of the state. There is a big gap. I even drew a line on it. Perhaps the minister could see that. There are no links between the desalination plant and the communities in Ripon that are in the grip of terrible, terrible drought and that need the assistance that could come from creating this pipeline to Wedderburn and some other things.

Again, the minister is being, I think, a bit tricky in some of her language. Yesterday in question time, in answer to a water question from the Leader of The Nationals, she noted that we needed this water for our sporting groups and that those groups are in crisis. That is true, but it is not the desalination water that is going to help my sporting groups. It is not the desalination water that is going to in any way help Natte Yallock and Navarre, two communities which are paying full ticket to water their recreational grounds. What the minister has failed to tell the house is that if you are not on a pipeline now and you need recreational water, you pay full cost for it. I have got communities that are not on a pipeline. They are right in the middle of these various parts of the water grid that do not link up in my electorate, and they are paying huge amounts of money to water their recreational grounds.

If we talk about the Navarre community, they are a particularly special case, because Navarre has won the football and netball finals for the last three years running. Sport is absolutely at the heart of that community. They are really, really struggling with the drought, and yet how do they water the grounds? They have to pay full cost to do so. This government is not assisting them in any way. My greatest criticism is this idea that talking about turning on the desalination plant will somehow have an impact in my part of the world, that in some way this city-centric government is caring about people in country Victoria. Because it is not. Clearly, it is not. There is nothing here for those in my community.

Beyond the Wedderburn pipeline, there are other environmental and recreational needs in my electorate. I would highlight just one, and that is the plight of the Richardson River at Donald. The Richardson River at Donald has no environmental flows. It is largely dry. When it rains at all, it turns into a mud slick and it smells, and it is in the absolute middle of Donald. The people of Donald, surrounded by completely parched fields, live in a town that stinks because there is no water being delivered to the Richardson River. I do not see that water coming. I would call on the minister to deliver water to the Richardson River at Donald.

Again, we just see that this is all about turning on a white elephant desalination plant that was created under the last Labor government. They did not do too well out of the desalination plant last time. It is regarded as the greatest white elephant in Victoria. But they did not actually get that message. They were just not really able to get the message from the people of Victoria that that is not something they thought was a good idea. At the very first opportunity they get they turn it on.

Melbourne's water catchments are two-thirds full, but government members say, 'Oh no, we'll turn on the desalination plant'. And in the rhetoric and the commentary around that they add to it and say, 'Oh, there's terrible drought in western Victoria'. And there is terrible drought in western Victoria, but you are not doing anything to help it. You are not doing anything at all by turning on the desalination plant, because no water flows there. Go and look at the water grid that you are so keen on talking about. There is just no capacity for water to flow from there. Perhaps if you are actually serious about that, you would be announcing some projects that would — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Ripon should address her remarks through the Chair.

Ms STALEY — I am sorry, Speaker. Perhaps if the government were serious about that, it would be announcing some projects that would deliver water from the east through to western Victoria. I am sure the member for Lowan will have more to say about this because it concerns her electorate too. It also concerns the member for Mildura. We all face this in western Victoria. The government is not doing anything to assist the water problem in our communities. Instead it is, in my view, being quite misleading in trying to tie turning on the desalination plant in Wonthaggi with what is going on in western Victoria. They are separate issues. They need separate funding, and I call on the government to get on with it and fund this Wedderburn pipeline. It needs to do it really soon. These people have not had serious rain for three years.

Other parts of my electorate are experiencing a continuing drought, and yet in a range of measures this government has not addressed that need. Whether it be water — today it is about water — whether it be early childhood development or whether it be a whole lot of other areas, this government has abandoned these drought-affected communities. It is all very well for ministers to say that they come to Ripon — and I know they do; it is a great trip for them from Melbourne — but really it is about time that people started announcing some real things and getting on with some real projects. They keep on standing up and saying they are getting on with it. Well, they are not getting on with it in Ripon. I think that the government needs some action here. What is really disappointing for my community is that we are yet to see action on the Wedderburn pipeline and we are yet to see action in a whole lot of other ways, particularly when Labor has now been in government for so long. It is a disgrace. It is an absolute disgrace.

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) — Can I firstly just acknowledge students from St Bernard's College, who are in the gallery this afternoon. It is a great school, one that my father, Shane Carbines, attended a very long time ago, as did also the member for Niddrie.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr CARBINES — No, we have moved on since then. We welcome them to the Parliament of Victoria today.

Can I just note in regard to the matter of public importance that when the member for Ripon talked about constituents and farmers in her electorate carting water these past three years — and nearly two of those years were under the previous Baillieu and Napthine governments — she failed to outline any water infrastructure investment projects funded or delivered by the previous government of which she considers herself to be a part. Not one project could she name that was funded to support farmers or communities in her electorate to cart or deliver water. No wonder they have had those problems in her electorate, and they are due to the failure to deliver any investment or funding for water projects in her electorate under the previous government, a government whose greatest contribution under Ted Baillieu was to make gold the mineral emblem of Victoria. That was the greatest contribution that he made for Victorians. What a disgrace!

Could I also just note that the Leader of The Nationals talked about an acknowledgement of drought and of regional water shortages. At the same time as he seeks to claim that on this side of the house the government is manufacturing a water crisis he can also acknowledge that regional communities are in drought, that regional communities are suffering water shortages. How can he claim that and at the same time say that we are creating a shortage of water in this state?

I will just touch also on a range of water initiatives in metropolitan Melbourne and the significant funds that water users in Melbourne's suburbs contribute to the infrastructure that generates water savings and water structure across Victoria. Let us talk about City West Water delivering recycled water to the western growth corridor, including Wyndham and Melton, which I am sure we will hear more about.

Western Water is led by chair Terry Larkins, a very experienced individual when it comes to public policy on water and leadership in the Victorian community. He is extremely well respected in the water industry, and he knows very well the challenges in the western suburbs and the outer western regions of Victoria.

We have also seen that Yarra Valley Water, my local water authority, has made a decision to rebuild its sewage treatment plant at Wallan, and that is also going to include a recycled water plant. This is about bringing technology, innovation and jobs into Victoria.

South East Water has also approved a project at the estate at Lyndhurst. It is being jointly developed by privately owned Villawood Properties and the state utility, South East Water, and includes unique water recycling features estimated to save something like 70 per cent of drinking water.

We are also very familiar with a previous Labor government's program, the Schools Water Efficiency Program. It was developed under Labor and that pioneer of water policy and getting water policy back on the agenda here in Victoria, a former Deputy Premier and now the chair of Melbourne Water, the Honourable John Thwaites. Let us just touch on the fact that Victorian schools saved more than 2.1 billion litres of water that would have cost more than \$5.7 million over the last three years, and they did that through early identification of leaks. Those are the sorts of savings we have seen through schools that have participated in that program.

We can also touch upon targeted rebates. We have seen a targeted rebate program introduced by Labor that has helped people to save water and save money on their water bills. That program started in July 2015.

Let us talk also about what we have seen over the past decade in the Victorian community, particularly around investment in Victoria's water grid. We have heard a lot about water infrastructure from those opposite but not much about what they have delivered in funding or investment in projects in Victoria's regions. Members should have a look at the Sugarloaf north-south pipeline, the Melbourne-Geelong pipeline, the Tarago-Warragul-Moe pipeline, the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline, the goldfields super-pipe connecting Ballarat and Bendigo to the northern water system, the Hamilton-Grampians interconnector, the modernisation of the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District which is currently underway, the modernisation of the Sunraysia irrigation district which is currently underway and of course the Victorian desalination project. These are all about the Victorian Labor government in the past and now and into the future focusing on using the grid — understanding and expanding the grid for the benefit of all Victorians.

Picking up on what the Leader of The Nationals said, I will refer to some of the atrocities that were committed by that former government which absolutely put to the

sword the raising in a matter of public importance matters trying to criticise the Andrews Labor government, which has followed on from previous pioneering work of Labor governments to put not only water policy back at the forefront of our economy here in Victoria but also jobs and innovation and investment opportunities right around the state. From my visits around regional Victoria, I know that you do not have to explain climate change to farmers, that you do not have to explain the effect that that has had on their livelihoods, on their communities and their businesses. You can also hear how keen they are to work with the Victorian Labor government to make sure that they continue to get the support and investment that they need.

Let us have a look at Target 155. It was, of course, scrapped by a former water minister, the Leader of The Nationals, who said that the Target 155 campaign was more about politics than the genuine conservation of water. When we come to politics, let us just have a bit of a look. He said that it was effectively an aspiration and just political spin by the previous government. We also notice that of course what we found when we looked at the reports that were done by water authorities in relation to these matters was that Tony Kelly, the Yarra Valley Water boss at the time, said that it was very popular and very valuable. A report which was conducted jointly by Melbourne's three water retailers claimed the influence of Target 155 could be identified using modelling that eliminated the impact of daily temperatures and rainfall on consumption. It found that water savings of 53 billion litres were calculated for the period between the scheme's introduction in December 2008 and August 2010. The report said:

The T155 campaign has been effective in reducing water consumption in Melbourne.

Clearly that explains why the Leader of The Nationals, a former water minister, would want to scrap that target. He cannot possibly justify or explain why he would have cut that target. In the previous government we had the usual National Party tail wagging the Liberal dog, which we have seen time and time again. It is all about punishing Victorians. They want Myrtle killing off her rose in the front garden. They want to punish Victorians. The member for South Barwon wants to bring back serious water restrictions to Geelong, rather than using infrastructure and pipelines between Geelong and Melbourne invested in by the Labor government. They want to punish Victorians. They want to introduce water restrictions. They do not want to use a lot of the technology and infrastructure that Labor has built.

Of course we just really need to explain again to the people of Victoria and again remind them and those opposite in particular about what those opposite did when they finally got the opportunity to be in government, when they finally were given that great privilege by the people of Victoria, particularly those in the regional communities that they claim to represent — the diminishing number of places in regional Victoria that they represent. They had the opportunity to put their vision on water into practice, so what exactly did they do? They established the Office of Living Victoria (OLV), which we all remember well. Denis Napthine, the previous Premier, said in the adjournment responses on 18 February 2014:

The Office of Living Victoria is a monument to the work of the Minister for Water.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CARBINES — No truer statement has been uttered by the former unelected Premier of Victoria, Denis Napthine. I will just have a bit of a look here at a couple of the items that I am sure my colleagues will go to in more detail. Can we remember Simon Want, the Howard government adviser who resigned prior to the release of the scathing Ombudsman's report into the Office of Living Victoria? James Lantry — the member for Richmond would know of some work that was done to expose some of the atrocities committed by James Lantry, a chief of staff to a former Minister for Local Government, Jeanette Powell. There was a \$118 000 three-month contract, and two media companies and a research firm linked to Lantry also received more than \$500 000 from Office of Living Victoria contracts in 2013.

Chris Chesterfield, the inaugural CEO, had a several hundred thousand dollar contract in a position that was not put to tender. They did not want any scrutiny on the expenditure of public money. Peter Coombes — remember him? — a \$1.5 million contract that was not put to tender. Mike Waller replaced Chesterfield as CEO in October 2012 and resigned prior to the release of the Ombudsman's report. Simon Want was paid \$254 000 for liaison services between the Office of Living Victoria and the office of the former minister, the member for Murray Plains, between mid-2012 and March 2013 before signing on with the OLV.

Mr D. O'Brien — On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we know that whenever the Labor Party has nothing to say, it goes to OLV on water. This is not related to the matter of public importance. I ask you to bring the speaker back to the issue.

Mr Brooks — On the point of order, Speaker, the matter of public importance clearly talks about cost pressures and I think the member for Ivanhoe is clearly talking about the extravagance of the previous government.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired, and there is no point of order.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) — It is a great privilege to stand up today for the National Party and to stand up for the people of country Victoria, particularly the drought-ravaged area of western Victoria, and to support the member for Murray Plains's matter of public importance. It is absolutely abhorrent that any government would use drought-ravaged farmers as pawns in order to turn on a desalination plant that is costing us \$1.8 million a day. It is absolutely appalling. This is not just rhetoric that has come from one or two people in the past; we actually heard the minister today stand up and say, 'We never ever said that the desalination plant would be linked to the drought'. Well, it has been reported in the media by many people. We even heard the Minister for Education confirm just yesterday that this is a linkage, that we have built up this drought — and it is an important drought we have in our part of the world.

For the last 24 months we have had the lowest rainfall on record. Our water storages are down to horrific levels — 26.5 per cent across the whole of the catchment area in the Wimmera-Mallee. If you look at Rocklands Reservoir, that is down to a mere 14 per cent.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms KEALY — It is much lower than 63 per cent, which apparently is critically low. I do not know where 14 per cent falls on that scale, but if that is not critically low, then I do not know what is.

It is very interesting to note what is critically low and when we should utilise our water in a conservative way and manage our resources appropriately. But this Labor government does not appear to understand that. I remember when Rocklands was at about 23 per cent and this government proudly stood up and said, 'We are going to give 5000 megalitres to Lake Toolondo to feed the fish and keep them alive'. That water flowed, and most of it evaporated. Lake Toolondo is now at 9 per cent and the fish are dying. It was 12 months until it was completely gone.

I know from speaking to people on the Glenelg River, such as the Leemings who live in Pigeon Ponds and whom I have spoken to recently, and from talking to

other people, farmers in the area who are struggling to get any water for their stock through that region — they are going through water carting — that they would tell each and every one of those sitting over there who have their heads down, taking their notes, looking at their phones and hanging their heads in shame, that they threw that water away rather than look after the people in their region. Have a look at our food producers. Members opposite should be absolutely hanging heads in shame about that.

The ridiculous thing is that it is purported that turning on the desalination plant will somehow fix the drought we have in western Victoria. It is simply not possible. I refer to a document that was used at a parliamentary briefing on only 11 February, which shows that there is actually no way to link in and send water from the desalination plant to western Victoria. It is fantastic talking to our local people —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms KEALY — The Labor government has actually purported this on many occasions, including on 7 October last year actually. I will refer to that if you would like me to; I am more than happy to. It states:

Water minister Lisa Neville recently toured the Wimmera and Mallee regions in the north and west of the state to assess conditions caused by low rainfall, which has sparked concerns about agricultural land and local communities.

Last night Ms Neville said it was too early to say what recommendations would come from the review, but that using desalinated water in the future was possible.

Headline: it is not possible. Although I think we might have a solution. We really need of course a lot of support for industry, so perhaps we can truck the water the 460 kilometres from Wonthaggi. I think that would be a great idea. I have been speaking to Chris Jones down at the local Mitre 10 and he is pretty stoked, as it might be a good opportunity to sell a few hoses — 460 kilometres of hose from Wonthaggi through to the Wimmera, not to mention the sprinklers. We have broadacre farmers through the Mallee and areas of the Wimmera and I am sure we could sell quite a few tractor-sprinklers through that area. I think the farmers would get a pretty good deal at Mitre 10 if they ended up buying in bulk; it should be pretty good for the local economy so I would support that. If the government was going to do that, that would be fabulous.

I really do not think that it is realistic. When you put it in those terms you can see just how ridiculous it is that you could in any way, shape or form try to link the drought to the desalination plant. It is not possible. The government is treating our local people like fools, and it

should be ashamed of that. And do not forget that this is building up the expectations of our local food producers that somehow turning on the desalination plant is going to help them in the short term. An Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences report released just last week shows that the average income for a farmer in our region in the past year was \$20 000. The minimum wage is \$34 000. If you think it is acceptable to use farmers who are earning barely half of the minimum wage, who are working very hard to put food on your supermarket shelves when they cannot even afford to put food on their own tables, that is absolutely appalling.

When you look at this government, it says it stands up for the workers, but if you live in country Victoria, you just do not count. If you live beyond the tram tracks, you just do not count. The fact that the government is trying to use these people on \$20 000 as pawns in political pointscoring to resuscitate a dead white elephant is absolutely appalling, and it should be ashamed about that.

It is not just the water minister who has been talking about linking the desalination plant to the drought. There were comments by the Minister for Education just yesterday in his ministers statement, and I quote:

Victorian schools will not have to endure the effects of drought due to the action of the Andrews government in placing an order for water from the Victorian desalination plant ...

The minister referred to Victorian schools. I would assume that if the government is talking about Victorian schools, it is talking about schools in the Wimmera-Mallee. So again, if the government is trying to say that it has not been trying to link the two, it has. I have actually seen it in *Daily Hansard*, and I am more than happy to take the government through that. Perhaps it does not understand how it works. But to have the Minister for Education then talking to schools and building that up, to link it together to say that —

Ms Green interjected.

Ms KEALY — It is interesting, is it not, that the member for Yan Yean thinks that it is acceptable that we cut off half of Victoria and we do not want to deliver services? You should hang your head in shame, Yan Yean; you should absolutely hang your head in shame.

The SPEAKER — Order! Through the Chair, member for Lowan.

Ms Green — On a point of order, Speaker, I take offence at the remarks made by the member for Lowan

when she said that I do not care about that matter, and I ask her to withdraw. I would ask her why she does not care that the federal government has said that her electorate is too remote for funding.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Lowan, to withdraw.

Ms Green interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Yan Yean!

Ms KEALY — The member for Yan Yean interjected and was making very offensive comments across the chamber. I think it is quite right that I accepted her interjection, and I ask that it be included in *Hansard*.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Lowan to withdraw.

Ms KEALY — I withdraw.

If we look at a media release from the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water from just two weeks ago, we see, and I quote:

We're taking action so that kids don't have to play on rock-hard ovals, so gardens and sporting ovals are green and will ensure a secure water supply for schools, hospitals and homes from Melbourne to Ballarat.

It does not include this area in western Victoria. Again western Victoria is ignored. It is a constant theme we hear from this Labor city-centric government, 'We are going to govern for all of Victoria', but when it comes to the crunch, those opposite talk about Victorian schools but only mean the schools out to Ballarat. If you go any further down the highway, you can see that we just do not count. We do not count under this Andrews Labor government, and it is absolutely appalling.

So what support are we getting for hospitals, schools and sporting clubs across the region? Zero! There is nothing out there. It might be that the only grassed area in town is the school oval, and the sporting club might have the only grassed patch in town. Yet there is no support, even though we have constantly called for water rate relief. We have constantly called for subsidies for the sporting clubs. Do not forget, some clubs which have gone through forced amalgamations, particularly football clubs, are managing two ovals. They could be spending up to \$25 000 a year to maintain their grounds as grassy and green.

The fact that there is no recognition that the people who volunteer at these clubs — the people who volunteer at the hospital auxiliaries to make money for the hospital community and the school council and the families and volunteers for schools — are the ones who are going to have to pick up that extra work. They are the ones who are going to have to put their hands in their pockets, and they are the ones who are currently suffering from drought. The fact that those opposite do not acknowledge that and continue to ignore our country people is absolutely appalling.

Let me quickly mention water infrastructure. We have done a lot in western Victoria. John Forrest — Mr Pipeline — the former federal member for Mallee, proposed in his preselection speech that we should build a pipeline. He was the federal member from 1992 to 2013, and he did a fabulous job. I also mention the Five Towns Project delivered in his last term of government, which ensured that Minyip, Rupanyup, Jeparit, Wycheproof and Donald, all in drought-affected areas, now have access to a potable water supply. This is something I am very, very proud of. It is a coalition government and a conservative government that delivers strong water supplies to country Victoria. Only conservative politicians deliver for country Victoria. We are the only ones who care about country Victoria. According to Labor, we do not even exist. We do not appear on the maps. The government does not even care that we are not logged into this state's water grid, which does not even exist.

I think it is absolutely appalling what this government is doing. The government should be condemned for such deception and spin at the expense of our suffering farmers.

The SPEAKER — Order! I welcome the member for Buninyong back into this house.

Mr HOWARD (Buninyong) — Thank you, Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to speak on this matter of public importance, because it does relate to a matter of public importance. However, I am surprised that the Leader of The Nationals has put this forward as his matter of public importance, and it is almost masochistic for him to do so, because I can speak very proudly from this side of the house about the difference between Labor and its policies that have supported Victoria through times of challenging water restrictions and the opposition members — who quite rightly are the opposition.

I want to speak especially in regard to country and regional Victoria, particularly after that rather perverse speech by the member for Lowan, preceded by the

member for Ripon. They want to try to pretend that they are the only ones who care about country and regional Victoria, but they are clearly deluded in that, as Labor has delivered strongly to country and regional Victoria and will continue to do so. Those opposite try to misuse the very sound announcement by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water to release water from the desalination plant and suggest that in some way it is going to disenfranchise country Victoria as a result, which is clearly not the case.

We understand that the reason the government has taken the decision to release water from the desalination plant is that we know that last year we had unprecedented low rainfall, in the second half of the year in particular. We had the lowest flows into our water catchments that we have had for more than 30 years across the state. Certainly my electorate has experienced those dry conditions, as have electorates across the state. As a member representing a country regional electorate I know that it has been tough for so many people. It gets tough for people in the city, but it is also very tough for those who rely on rainfall for their livelihood — the farmers and so on — who, as a result of those poor rainfalls throughout the second half of last year were not able to get their crops off and get forage and fodder for their stocks and as a result experienced very difficult situations in the second half of last year.

But I am very pleased to be on the side of the house that committed early on in the piece. The Premier went up to some of those badly affected areas, in particular the Mallee and the Wimmera in the north of the state, where they were experiencing those droughts. He was out there as early as October when it was apparent that things were getting very tough for people as they were getting their crops off, and we made significant announcements to support all of those drought-affected farmers in a very proactive way. We did not hang back and wait for the federal government or other governments to act. We got in and delivered a very comprehensive \$27.3 million package of support for those living through the drought, and that is flowing on through a range of supports to individual farmers.

We recognise that the trauma associated with experiencing drought means that we need counselling and psychological support for farmers in some cases, right through to recognising we need a range of other practical supports in terms of supplying or supporting water storage and water carting, as need be. There are a range of processes in place. Of course, as I said, the Premier last year visited places including Birchip, Donald, Wedderburn and Charlton to see the effects of the drought firsthand, and the comments that were presented in the *Weekly Times* and other newspapers

that particularly represent country Victoria were very positive about our government's stance in supporting those farmers who were experiencing drought. That is a very important issue, but for some reason the members for Ripon and Lowan do not seem to understand that and they want to misrepresent the activities of our government in its very strong support for those country communities that are affected.

I want to focus as the member for Buninyong on the history of water supply in Buninyong and make the contrast between Labor and others, and how when we experienced the millennium drought over the years from 1999 to 2009 we took action to ensure that all communities across the state were supported. We have heard a lot about the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, for example, and of course those on the other side, The Nationals, want to say that it was John Forrest who did it. We know John Forrest was an active local federal member promoting the scheme, but it took the Bracks and Brumby governments to put money up front and to say, 'Yes, we want to get going with that project'.

We put it up ahead of the feds, and we challenged the federal government to come good with its money, which it eventually did. We saw the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline erected in the time of the Bracks and Brumby governments when it had not been constructed beforehand, so let us not rewrite history. Let us recognise that Labor governments have been committed to supporting all Victorians and doing these major water projects across the state. We will hear from the member for Shepparton soon, and no doubt she will talk about the food bowl renewal project up in her area, which was of course supported by the previous Labor government.

In my electorate of Ballarat East, as it was at the time, now Buninyong, through the millennium drought we saw that Ballarat's ongoing water supply and its ability to supply potable water for the people of Ballarat and for the industry of Ballarat were under threat. Of course industry-wise we have a number of food industries, including McCain's and Mars, as well as the residents, who need a potable water supply to continue.

We did the work, and we said, 'We're going to need to link up to a water supply outside our catchment because our catchment is running down. Our White Swan Reservoir and the Lal Lal Reservoir are both getting lower and lower. We need a water supply from outside our catchment'. Hence the goldfields super-pipe was planned by the Labor government and it was constructed by the Labor government, bringing water from the north of the state via Bendigo and providing a

link to Ballarat so that Ballarat people had a source of water from outside the catchment.

What did the present Leader of The Nationals, and others who were here at the time say? They scoffed at the idea. They said, 'Why would you bring water from somewhere else? Ballarat just needs to get a better supply out of the Lal Lal Reservoir'. That was their solution. Geelong could get extra water, they said, from an aquifer in the Otways and that would free up the Lal Lal Reservoir to give more water to Ballarat. Well, the fact was that when you have got no water in your catchment it does not matter if you get it from Lal Lal. If the water had not been there, Ballarat would have run out of water in the summer of 2008–09 — if it had not been for the Labor government and the goldfields super-pipe in connecting Ballarat in a very timely way ahead of that summer of 2008–09. The opposition's only proposal was to pray for rain locally. Opposition members said, 'Rain will happen'. They were right. We always know that rain will come; we just do not know when and how much, sadly. We know that after the millennium drought we had two good years of rain through 2009 and 2010, but last year was a very low rainfall period. When I look at the figures for my farm I can see that the second half of the year was the lowest I have recorded in more than 20 years.

We know we have to act. The government has taken action by saying, 'Yes, we do need to use the desalination plant that is there. It is available to the people of Victoria. Run some water there so the Melbourne supply can be greater'. As a Labor government over the years we have not just built the goldfields super-pipe but also put the connector into Geelong so that Geelong can benefit from water flow from the Melbourne catchment when it is high, as it is and will be with this additional water, and we need to move the water around so that there is the possibility of Ballarat using water in the Lal Lal Reservoir, if it is there. But if it is not there, we know we have the goldfields super-pipe.

So using water from the around the state is a sensible thing to do. The other statements made by the members for Lowan and Ripon, whingeing about how their electorates are hard done by, were not factual. Labor has committed so many funds in so many ways to Lowan, to Ripon and to other electorates. We have represented all of Victoria, and we will continue to do so. The super-pipe has been a great addition. The water from the desalination plant will also be very beneficial.

Mr GIDLEY (Mount Waverley) — I rise to make a contribution this afternoon on this matter of public importance, and I do so not with pleasure, because as a

consequence of this topic and as a consequence of the decisions that the Victorian Labor government has taken residents in my district, small and medium-size businesses and residents across Melbourne are once again going to bear the brunt, which will mean an increase in living costs. Rather than supporting households and families to achieve their goals and aspirations, the Victorian government is making it harder for households and families and making it harder for small and medium-size businesses to reach the destination they want as a result of its decision to turn on the desalination plant.

It is really true to form in relation to a number of decisions that the government has taken, which I will outline to the chamber this afternoon. Water bills are certainly an important part of any household budget expenditure, whether it is a household, a family or a small or medium-size business. Under this government, as a result of its decision to turn on its white elephant desalination plant to justify its existence, water bills will be higher. Water bills throughout the year will be higher for families, households and small and medium-size businesses.

I note that in 2016 alone Melbourne water customers will pay \$637 million for Labor's white elephant desalination plant and the extra water. That is right — \$637 million. The cost of this will increase Melbourne water bills by around \$12 a year. For many households and families that is just another cost, another impost, on the household budget, which will make it harder for them to stay afloat let alone achieve the goals and outcomes they want. The result will be without a doubt less capacity for households and families to plan, work and achieve their goals and aspirations, as in reality they will be working to give yet more of their incomes to the Premier and his throwaway-taxpayer-funds government. In addition, high business costs through higher Melbourne water bills will no doubt lead to increased job losses and increased job insecurity. It will reduce job creation and there will be less capacity for businesses to provide increased income to employees, contractors and suppliers and, as a consequence, it will flow through to cost-of-living issues for household budgets, particularly when we are in a period of relatively low income growth compared to other times.

Higher water costs no doubt will filter through the entire Victorian economy, because so many goods and services are affected by the price of water. So when this government makes a decision to justify its white elephant desalination plant by putting up the cost of water and the cost of water bills there is no question that everyday items will be more expensive to buy and will affect household budgets. Both directly and

indirectly the cost of living will rise through this government's higher water bills. You might ask: why on earth would you need higher water bills in Melbourne given that water storages are nearly two-thirds full and we are not on water restrictions? Added to that there are many areas in Victoria which may be doing it tough on water but which will not be able to access the desalinated water regardless of what the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water says when she seeks to mislead people when she is out and about in the community.

Therefore it is reasonable and logical to assume — and really it is the only conclusion you can come to — that the reason this decision to flick the switch on the desalination plant has been made, the only reason for this decision to inflict higher water bills on households and families, to inflict higher water bills on small and medium-size business and to inflict higher water bills to flow through the entire Victorian economy on goods and services, is to justify the white elephant desalination plant that everybody knows should never have been built in the way it was.

This is a serious topic. The cost of living is taken seriously on this side of the house, even if it is not on the other side of the house. We understand that cost-of-living pressures hit families and households, and we are committed to reducing and will fight to reduce cost-of-living pressures at every opportunity rather than seeking to increase them, as this government is. As I said, on this topic of the cost of living and water bills and how they feed through, this is really true to form in a number of areas where this government has made it harder for households and families to stay afloat or get ahead. There are a number of key areas, which I will outline to the house now.

Take the insurance tax take, for example. We know from the government's own budget papers that the insurance tax take is going to increase 5.4 per cent this year — well above the rate of inflation — at a time when the government, even on its own revised figures, shows on the forward estimates surplus figures. So again we have a situation here, because insurance policies are a key part of household and small to medium size business costs.

Under this government a higher insurance tax take will increase the cost of living for households and families, making it harder for them to get ahead and making it harder for them to achieve their goals and aspirations. It will result in a reduced capacity for those families and households and those small to medium size businesses to be able to plan to work to achieve their goals. It is another classic example of asking Victorians to work

harder to give yet more of their income to the Premier and to his throw-away-taxpayer-funds government. It is a casual, throw-away-taxpayer-funds government; there is no question about that. So the insurance tax take is up 5.4 per cent on the government's own figures this year at a time when inflation is well below that.

In addition to that, there will also be the flowthrough to business costs as a result of the higher insurance tax take. Higher business costs through a higher state government insurance tax take will mean increased job losses. It will mean increased job insecurity, reduced job opportunities and less capacity for businesses to provide increased income to their employees, to their suppliers and to their contractors. Of course if there is less income in the pay packet, or less income going through on the invoices that are taken, it makes it a double whammy, really, when the higher water bills come in. You have reduced income capacity and you also have those higher costs. Additionally, the higher insurance tax take will flow through the whole economy, exactly like higher water bills. It will lead to higher prices across the economy and therefore a higher cost of living. So again, on that particular matter, directly and indirectly, we have seen the government — true to form — making it harder for Victorian families and households to be able to get ahead.

The motor vehicle tax take is up 4.5 per cent this year, again well above the rate of inflation. We know that motor vehicle expenses are a key part of any household budget for families and for small and medium size businesses. The tax take is up 4.5 per cent, making it harder again for the family budget — the household budget — to stretch and making it harder for small to medium size businesses to be able to put a vehicle on the road or, heaven forbid, invest in another vehicle or another employee. So of course that is another example of this government making it harder for Victorians, harder for households and harder for businesses, whether it is higher water bills or an increase in the tax take on motor vehicle.

Let us not forget the government's plan to put in additional tolls on the Monash corridor for motorists to pay for a road on the other side of Melbourne which they may never even use — up to \$40 000 over 12 years in extra tolls out of the household budget, on top of that 4.5 per cent.

We know that the payroll tax take is up 6.2 per cent — that is right, 6.2 per cent, Acting Speaker! You would think that at a time when you want to encourage job creation you might want to reduce payroll tax, particularly when you have surpluses over the forward estimates, but what does this government do? It

increases its payroll tax take by 6.2 per cent. No question about that: that is going to impact on job opportunities and increase job insecurity, with less job opportunities and more job losses. Again, as a consequence of that there will be lower income levels into households and lower income levels into small and medium size businesses.

Therefore when you look at the matter of public importance today and you put that water bill increase in perspective, it is the cumulative effect that really worries me as somebody representing my district and standing up and fighting for a reduction in cost-of-living pressures for families and households and small to medium size businesses — as we on this side of the house are, unlike those opposite. It is the cumulative increases of the water bills. It is the cumulative increases of the higher motor vehicle tax take of 4.5 per cent, the higher insurance tax take of 5.4 per cent and the higher payroll tax take of 6.2 per cent. It all says one thing, Acting Speaker, and that is that this a government that is determined to tax, to tax and to tax and to make it harder for Victorian households and families to get ahead and to put increased cost-of-living pressures on small to medium size businesses and households.

This is a government that, rather than going out and supporting Victorians, is working against them. It is a government that has the wrong priorities, as we have seen here today with a captain's lounge at the Bendigo railway station. It is a government that has the wrong priorities. You would like to think that this government may in some way have some understanding of cost-of-living pressures, but its actions show that it does not understand cost-of-living pressures. This water bill increase is going to hurt families and households.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) — I am pleased to rise today to make a contribution on this matter of public importance, and I would like to thank the government for giving me the opportunity to speak on this matter. I live in terror of drought, and I well remember the millennium drought. Many seemed to have forgotten it. Things that happen in the past are often easily forgotten, and as a reminder of how bad that drought was I took the opportunity to go through some of the *Victorian Water Accounts* reports during the drought just to perhaps remind members of what it was like at that time and what governments were saying at that time.

In the *Victorian Water Accounts 2006–07* report the foreword says:

Low rainfall and severe drought conditions were major challenges for Victorians ...

The 11th consecutive year of drought in Victoria saw water storage levels and stream flows drop to seriously low levels in many basins.

Water businesses, in consultation with the Victorian government, implemented their drought response plans ...

Then the 2007–08 report says:

It was another year of low inflows and storages. Basic human needs for water were met through a range of contingencies and drought response plans implemented by Victoria's water businesses.

...

The climate of the last 11 years has resulted in a major reduction in stream flows and inflows into Victoria's major reservoirs, resulting in severe water shortages for communities and the environment across the entire state.

In 2009–10 the challenge of the 13th straight year of the drought is dramatically highlighted in the *Victorian Water Accounts*, which states:

The year started with water supplies and inflows at extremely low levels and ended with storages in a worse situation ...

And:

In addition, the worst bushfires of the century directly affected water supplies in several towns and damaged many of the water supplies in our catchments ...

It was a really difficult time, and governments were faced with the challenge of what to do about it. On my own experiences during that time, my family farm at Jerilderie in southern New South Wales had for years gone without water. When you are an irrigation farm, you have to have water to grow crops. Year after year we failed to grow crops, so the family farm was sold. That is by no means an isolated situation; all around us that was happening. So many farmers had to take the decision to move on because we did not know when the drought was going to end. After 13 years you just simply cannot comprehend that it might actually rain again, and the devastation in those areas was great, so that was a chapter of history that we had to close in our family.

A staff member recently told me the story of driving along the Northern Highway near Heathcote and seeing an empty dam and dead sheep — a whole lot of dead sheep around the edge of the dam that had been shot by the farmer because there was simply no water. She recalls being in the street with her utility loaded with hay and a farmer begging her to sell that hay to him for the remaining stock on his property.

Recently I was in Mildura where I talked with Stefano di Pieri, the well-known chef. He talked about a time in the drought when things were so grim, when things

looked so dry and so awful, that he and his family purchased water to turn on the sprinklers on the nature strip in Deakin Avenue to make it look green and try to lift the spirits of people in the town, because people were really suffering. All members will know what the water restrictions were like. Melbourne was in a terrible state because of the water restrictions, and right across Victoria that was the way.

To me, this whole discussion is about risk management, and you have to manage these risks. We know that we get severe droughts, and we know that climate change is upon us. When I speak to farmers, they are very often the first to acknowledge that things have changed and to acknowledge climate change. In the mid-2000s a group formed in Shepparton called the food bowl group, and we could see what was happening in relation to water in our district, so a vision had to be created of what our district might look like — what the Goulburn-Murray irrigation district could end up like. Negotiations were conducted with the government, and out of that came the connections project — the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project (NVIRP). At that time the decision was to try to reduce the footprint of irrigation, because it was believed that many more farmers would leave the district, that they would simply not be able to maintain their farms and they would go. There was a desperate need for the whole economic and social value of that community to maintain at least a part of an irrigation district.

We had 4500 kilometres of open channel. They had seepage, they had evaporation and they had out-of-date irrigation practices. Here was an opportunity, and it was grasped. Our group negotiated with the government for ultimately \$2 billion — \$1 billion from the state, \$1 billion from the commonwealth — for that project, which is now underway. That project has had its ups and downs. NVIRP has been subsumed into Goulburn-Murray Water — huge delays because of that. It has had problems throughout. It rained, and many more farmers who thought they would go decided they would stay, so we had this huge number of additional farmers now wanting to be connected to the biggest irrigation development and modernisation project in Australia, so it has got its challenges.

Only last week the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water announced that she was appointing a project control group to manage the rolling out of the remainder of this project, because we are waiting on another almost \$1 billion from the commonwealth for the finalisation of that project, which is the major investment that is occurring in our community. It is so important that the commonwealth continues with that

investment and that that modernisation goes ahead — and hopefully on time and on budget.

The desalination plant and the north–south pipeline were really a part of that overall plan of water management. The goldfields super-pipe was happening, and Ballarat and Bendigo were without water. To me, this whole discussion is about sharing our water. When Federation commenced, the first major discussion about water was the management of the River Murray, so legislation was passed to manage the river, and in 1914 the very first river management agreement was executed, which 100 years ago was momentous. In 2014 the next agreement was signed, and it was a very different one, let me tell you, because it is all about water management, about the environment and about the sharing of water.

When the north–south pipeline was built, from the perspective of many of us in our community that was about sharing water. People I spoke to took the view that if Melbourne was to be without critical water needs for human consumption, then we were prepared to share the water in our storages for Melbourne. Similarly I do not doubt that if the reverse were the case — if we were out of water in the north, and the pipeline could be reversed — there would be an opportunity to send water back. In the south of the state we have the only facility in this state that is not dependent upon rain to produce water — that is, the desalination plant. Every city in Australia has a desalination plant — Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth. Perth has two, and the Perth plants are functioning, Adelaide still will not turn its plant on, and Sydney is relying on its plant.

I think it is essential that we manage risk and have preparations in place for what could come again. We saw it, we lived through it, we know how bad it is and how bad it can be — and right now we are back to some of the lowest water flows on record coming into our catchments. This could all happen to us again. It is a horrible thought, but it could happen to us again. I am not here to criticise either side of politics in this discussion. I just say there is some common sense in managing your risk, in having access to the infrastructure that you need to share water throughout the state. I think I have made my point very clearly in that it is about water sharing and it is about water going both ways. It is about water going to our small towns and our big towns. It is about managing our rivers and, with a growing population, finding another source of water that is not rain dependent, and thank God we have done that.

Mr KATOS (South Barwon) — I rise in support of the matter of public importance that has been submitted

by the member for Murray Plains. When you talk about the desalination plant, it is the absolute monument to Labor ideology. You have got a project that was really there for the union mates. It was originally supposed to cost around \$3 billion to build. All of a sudden that blew out to \$5.1 billion, and it is no surprise that the union workers working there nicknamed the place Treasure Island because of the ridiculously generous conditions that were given on that site. That is what they called it: Treasure Island. It was such a bad contract for Victoria that was signed by former water minister Tim Holding.

If we look at Geelong's storages, we see that Geelong has quite a few smaller dams and bigger dams. The storages that Geelong has include West Barwon Reservoir, Wurdee Boluc Reservoir, Bostock Reservoir, Stony Creek Reservoirs and Lal Lal Reservoir. Interestingly some of Lal Lal Reservoir water has now been given to Ballarat. Geelong's total water capacity is 95 393 megalitres, and of that a total of 16 793 megalitres is Barwon Water's share of Lal Lal Reservoir, which is shared with Central Highlands Water for Ballarat. Geelong's share of Lal Lal Reservoir is now down to 10 341 megalitres, but the rest has all been given to Ballarat; Geelong has lost that share.

So when those opposite are quoting Geelong's water storages, the figures that they are quoting are incorrect because they are assuming that Barwon Water's share of Lal Lal Reservoir is still ours — it is not. While they say that storages are at about 38 per cent, they are actually down to about 33 per cent, because you cannot count Lal Lal anymore in Geelong's storages, as that belongs to Ballarat now. So when you look at the cost of water production, Barwon Water's cost for West Barwon Reservoir is \$50 a megalitre, Lal Lal's is \$80 a megalitre, Barwon Downs bore field's is \$100 a megalitre, Anglesea bore field's is \$200 a megalitre, while desalination costs \$5000 a megalitre. So that is the cost to Barwon Water of taking desalination water.

As I have mentioned, Lal Lal's share has gone to Ballarat, so we have lost that. What Barwon Water has done is give us water through the Geelong–Melbourne interconnector, so we are now connected to Melbourne Water and to Melbourne's water system. So it has effectively taken Geelong's water and given it to Ballarat, and we are taking Melbourne's water. That is the deal that has been done. It was interesting to see the releases that have been put out. It is interesting that Barwon Water did not put anything out until yesterday, and it said that its prices are locked until June 2018 with the water plan that it has got. However, there is no talk about increasing debt, so perhaps Barwon Water will

not be asked to increase debt and absorb the higher cost of the water coming from Melbourne. But come 20 June 2018, there is no assurance to Barwon Water customers that the prices will not be going up — that is the current water plan.

The member for Bellarine earlier talked about the costs of water dropping by 1.6 per cent per year. That is because of the water-saving initiatives of the coalition government and asking water boards right around the state to find water efficiencies. That is what happened there. The member for Bellarine also talked about putting stage 4 restrictions on everyone. The issue is that no form of restriction has been put on. We have seen that we have not had rainfall coming in. It has been dry, and no-one will dispute that, but why not put areas like, for example, Geelong on a stage 1 restriction or perhaps a stage 2? I do not suggest the harshest form of restriction but to try to have some way of stopping or slowing the use of water through a restriction that will not have a detrimental impact on the local economy, on sporting fields or on local clubs and businesses. But there has been nothing done. It has just been left to run down.

That was the point I made in Monday's *Geelong Advertiser*, where I said that this has been a deliberate course of action, because if we run down Geelong's reserves we are going to have to call on Melbourne Water to supply us with water from the desalination plant, and that is exactly what has been done. The minister said that water restrictions have not been required, but interestingly, if you go back to February 2010, Geelong had just dropped from stage 4 to stage 3 restrictions. Geelong's water storages at that stage were around 32 per cent. We are not far off that at the moment, and we are on no form of restriction whatsoever. Six years ago we were on stage 4, coming down to stage 3 with a similar volume of water, and, as I said, I am firmly of the belief that it has been a deliberate course of action. That Geelong-Melbourne interconnector was built for that purpose, for Geelong to take desalinated water. Because of the present water plan and the Essential Services Commission, Barwon Water is obviously not allowed to put prices up yet. But, as I said, are they going to put up debt, and what happens in June 2018? Those prices will go up.

I turn to another silly thing about Geelong, Barwon Water and this government. Barwon Water in the early 1990s purchased Dewing Creek, which is a tributary of the Barwon River. It was privately owned farmland. It has cattle grazing on it at the moment, so it is not pristine wilderness. It is not forest like in the Otway Ranges or anything like that. It is cleared farmland. Barwon Water bought that for the purpose of building a

dam. I recall that the late Glyn Jenkins and actually Rod Mackenzie, who is a former Labor President of the upper house, were very strong in their support for constructing that dam at Dewing Creek, and that is a sensible option to pursue. Barwon Water owns that land, and it has been in its possession for a long time. It is not forest. It does not displace wildlife, except for the cows of course that are grazing on it. But it would be a sensible cause course of action to investigate that. That is what we should be doing.

If you look at water boards, as I said, the issue of water boards is that they are all subservient to this government. They have all been hand-picked. The Minister for Women, who is at the table, at one stage wanted to use Labor Party membership lists as a way of finding good Labor women to put on boards. This is what they have been doing. They have been stacked with former Labor members. I know Elaine Carbines is on a water board. In fact my predecessor, Michael Crutchfield, the former member for South Barwon, is on a water board. So these boards have been stacked with Labor friendlies, and they are going to be completely subservient to the wishes of this government.

It was unprecedented that all those water boards were spilt. I understand the normal course of action is that as water board appointments finish they are replaced, but this was a complete spill of the boards. This was unprecedented. The member for Ivanhoe is smiling at the moment.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KATOS — In response to the member for Bayswater, they do get paid to be put on these boards. They get paid \$30 000-odd depending on whether they are chair — that is a normal water board member. I think the board member gets quite a bit more depending on which water board they indeed represent. It is just absurd what has been done in this sense. The government is trying to say, 'We want people that are skills based. We want them to have all the skills we want. They have got to be responsive to climate change. They have got to have business skills'. They have got to have all this list of things. But the main qualification is that they are Labor Party friendly. That is the main qualification for these boards. Really you should have a mixture of people. It is not all about just putting your mates on these boards. That is the issue we have in Geelong. Geelong residents will pay for this desalination plant; it was something that we knew when the interconnector was built.

I recall the story of a board member who told me that at the time Labor actually voted to not build it in its then water plan and to put it in its next water plan. The minister for water of the day sent his goon squad down that afternoon and asked them to change their decision. The board had to reconvene and was forced to change its decision. That came from a former board member — they told me that firsthand. That is how the former minister for water and members of the Brumby government used to behave — they sent their goons down to ride roughshod over water boards.

The desalination plant will see significant price rises not only in Melbourne but also in Geelong, and there are other options that are certainly available.

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — Sometimes in this place we get a glimpse of the potential this Parliament has to do good things, for members to come together on important policy challenges and issues that are really important for our state, for people on both sides of the chamber to put aside petty political differences and to come to a position of reason in the best interests of the Victorian people. I would suggest that water and the impact of potential drought is one of those areas in which we should be working as best as we possibly can in a way that puts party politics to one side to make sure we deliver the best outcome for all Victorian people.

We saw a glimpse of that sort of debate from the member for Shepparton, I have got to say, in her contribution. She made what I thought was quite a reasonable contribution. She spoke about the impact of the millennium drought on her own family — losing her farm in southern New South Wales, the importance of water infrastructure and being able to share water. I want to put on the record that I think people in Melbourne are quite willing to share water with people in other parts of Victoria, in regional and rural Victoria, just as the member for Shepparton said. People in her area and in other regional and rural areas are willing to share water. I think that the Victorian people understand the concept of sharing water and making sure that no-one runs out. They want to look after each other, and they do not see themselves as country Victorians or Melbourne Victorians; they see themselves as Victorians.

What we see from the National Party in particular in debates on water is always an attempt to divide Victorians, to play one Victorian off against another. We saw that in the term of the last Labor government, when the coalition ran a campaign in Morwell, and it ran campaigns around the north–south pipeline and on the desalination plant. The National Party will play this game where it will put its own base political interests

ahead of the wellbeing of the Victorian community. I think it should be condemned for that.

I also want to pick up a point that the member for Lowan made in her comments. She was very upset in making her contribution. I think she was upset because of the way in which members of this side of the house pointed out the failings of the former Nationals and Liberal Party government, which was in power for four years and did nothing to protect her area from water shortages. She did make the point that people should not play politics with drought-affected communities, and I agree with her.

This matter of public importance was put forward by the Leader of The Nationals. It could have been an opportunity for The Nationals to bring onto the floor of this Parliament a debate about the impact of drought conditions on parts of the state. We could have had a sensible discussion about the sorts of measures that need to be put in place across parts of Victoria, particularly the north-west, that are affected by drought. Instead we saw a very cheap bit of politics from the Leader of The Nationals in putting this particular matter of public importance before the house. That includes the wording of the matter of public importance — the red herring that this government, the Andrews Labor government, is somehow trying to claim that it is going to solve water shortage issues in certain parts of country Victoria, when it is impossible to deliver desalinated water to those areas. We are not claiming that. That is the sort of deception that you get from The Nationals.

Whenever you hear The Nationals talk about water, you need to get out the lie detector and plug it in, and it will blow up — it just shorts straightaway. The Nationals in particular just cannot be trusted in respect of anything you hear them say on water. Do not trust The Nationals because Nationals members have a track record of poor policy, of opposing pipelines and the water grid and then misleading Victorian communities about water policy.

The Andrews Labor government understands the importance of ensuring that communities throughout Victoria, here in Melbourne included, have confidence in their water supply. We understand the connection between a safe, constant water supply for Melbourne, for all Victoria, and our livability, our business confidence in investing and in ensuring that our livability remains extremely high. That is why, as the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water has pointed out, we have made the order to the desalination plant for 50 gegalitres, based on the independent and expert advice of Melbourne Water.

It is interesting that in this whole debate today on the issue of desalinated water, which I have listened to, not one member from the other side of the house has mentioned the technical analysis that has been made available on the Melbourne Water website. No-one has gone to the facts of this matter. No-one has gone on to debate the expert advice on seeking 50 gegalitres of water. We have had none of that from members opposite. Instead, as I said, we have had the really cheap political pointscore from those opposite.

We understand the impact of the water restrictions that those opposite are calling for on industries like the nursery and garden industry. I remember meeting with representatives of the peak body for the nursery and garden industry during the time of the last drought. They were concerned, because obviously water restrictions mean that people do not go out and buy plants, particularly when they know that those plants are not going to survive the dry weather and are not able to be watered. There are many jobs that rely on the avoidance of water restrictions. This government understands that, and it understands the importance of water for our livability and for employment.

One of the areas of industry that is really close to my heart, because I think it is going to play a large part in the future of the northern suburbs of Melbourne, is the food and fibre sector. The food and fibre sector is very important for the whole state, for areas of regional Victoria in terms of primary production and some processing, and also of course for parts of Melbourne where food and beverage manufacturing is extremely important. The food and fibre sector in 2013–14 accounted for nearly half of the state's total goods exports valued at \$11.8 billion and employed nearly 200 000 people. The food and beverage manufacturing sector is the largest manufacturing sector in Victoria. It accounts for 20 per cent of the state's manufacturing and it generates approximately 30 per cent of Australia's total food processing output — and the output value of Victorian food manufacturing in 2013 was some \$29 billion. This is an industry that relies on a safe water supply. It is an industry that will only see further private sector investment if there is a very clear position from the Victorian government that we will have a stable, secure water supply. That is exactly what the Andrews Labor government is delivering.

Again the problem is that we have political opponents on the other side of the house who are just interested in playing politics with this issue. They have a track record that is disgraceful. When the coalition was in government, the then Minister for Water set up the Office of Living Victoria, which has become known as the Office of Living It Up. There was a whole raft of

dodgy deals, contracts that were not put out to tender and that were awarded to people with consultancies, contracts that were awarded to the highest bidders and National Party mates paid out several hundred thousand dollars. It is just an absolute disgrace.

Those opposite have talked about cost-of-living pressures because of the increase in metropolitan water bills for desalinated water and about the need to do more in recycling projects, but we could have funded a lot of those recycling projects and we could have kept water bills down further if the National Party had not been living it up in the Office of Living Victoria and milking the Victorian taxpayer, as was found to be the case by the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman in uncovering those dodgy deals. One of those extremely embarrassing moments involved the \$651 000 grant that was given to Foscarelli Holdings Pty Ltd in Truganina for stormwater management that was never delivered. The bloke who was behind Foscarelli Holdings was one Henry Kaye. People might remember him from the property development sector. He is a very colourful character. That is \$651 000 gone. It was never delivered. That is just one example.

Peter Coombes was awarded a \$1.5 million contract. It did not go out to tender. Mike Waller replaced Mr Chesterfield as the chief executive officer of the Office of Living Victoria in 2012, but he darted out the door before the Ombudsman finished his report. James Lantry was the chief of staff to the Minister for Local Government at the time. He received \$118 000 for a three-month contract. Two media companies and a research firm linked to Mr Lantry also received more than \$500 000 from Office of Living Victoria contracts in 2013. It was a big National Party cash cow that was funded by the taxpayers of Victoria.

What an absolute shocker! And then its members have the front to come into this place and lecture us about cost of living — unbelievable. Some of these people should be behind bars. This is absolutely outrageous. It does not surprise me that members of The Nationals get upset when we talk about these issues. It does make me upset that when we talk about the important issue of water for this state we have these sorts of divisive politics and the deception that comes from The Nationals, particularly the Leader of The Nationals, when what we really need is the mature debate that we heard in the contribution from the member for Shepparton about sharing our water resources.

Mr D. O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) — I will take up where the member for Bundoora left off. It was pleasing to hear the member for Shepparton speak, and I am glad that members opposite gave her the

opportunity to speak on this because at least she is one member from that side — in terms of the debate, I hasten to add — who actually made some sense and who actually knows something about water, because we have heard from those opposite so far in this debate a whole lot of politics and no actual understanding of the water issues.

I am very pleased to speak on this matter of public importance put forward by the Leader of The Nationals. I want to begin by outlining an issue of importance to my electorate of Gippsland South that, while the government is desperately trying to relate it to the desalination plant, is not related to the desalination plant, and that is the Northern Towns project, which was so-called by South Gippsland Water. This project would connect the towns of Korumburra, Poowong, Nyora and Loch to the Lance Creek Reservoir and thence to a pipeline that goes to the Cardinia Reservoir and subsequently, if necessary, could be hooked into the Melbourne system. Before anyone says that now country Victoria is taking water from Melbourne, of course Gippsland supplies most of Melbourne's water already — Melbourne Water takes a large chunk of Melbourne's water through the Thomson Dam — and we do that, perhaps not happily, because we understand the need to support the city, and so it is only right that these parts of south-west Gippsland have the opportunity to access that water as well.

What I do want to highlight, though, in the context of this debate is that this project does not require desalinated water. The minister has given a wink and a nod, and I think even early last year she actually said straight out, that we may need to turn on the desalination plant to do this project. That is an absolute fallacy. The Northern Towns project, connecting Korumburra, Nyora, Loch and Poowong, does not require the desalination plant. It connects to Lance Creek and, as I said, thence to Cardinia if necessary, but it does not require desalinated water. I have had people in Korumburra, for example, say to me, 'We don't want that desal water'; well, they do not need to have the desalinated water. This is not a project that connects them to the desalination plant.

To put it into context, the minimum water that we have now got the desalination plant making for the government is 50 gegalitres — that is 50 000 megalitres. The entire South Gippsland Water supply area from Yarram through to Nyora, including Wonthaggi, Leongatha et cetera, only uses about 5 gegalitres — that is only about 5000 megalitres — so the notion that you would turn this plant on to supply the Northern Towns project is just ridiculous. But this project is very important because the area is growing,

Nyora in particular. Nyora and Poowong are areas where there is significant residential development, and Korumburra and Loch as well, but particularly in Korumburra where we have Burra Foods, the dairy plant which has grown exponentially in the last 10 to 15 years. It is a very important contributor to the town as well, and it needs a water supply. For it to be able to continue to grow, to take advantage of the wonderful dairy produce that we produce in that area, it does need a strong and secure water supply.

I very much hope that the government, in its rhetoric over the last few days, has given an indication that it will fund this important project. Under the previous business case that I have seen it is about a \$21 million contribution being sought from the state. I suspect that may go up a little bit, but I am hopeful that in the water plan that is supposedly going to be announced soon, or in the state budget, that this project will be funded, because it is a very important one for my electorate.

I talked about those opposite and their knowledge of water, and I was rather surprised to hear some of the comments from the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water in her contribution. She had a lot of criticism of the former minister, the Leader of The Nationals and member for Murray Plains. I can say, as someone who has actually worked in the water industry myself, that the member for Murray Plains has forgotten more than the minister will ever know about water and about water policy.

We had the minister having a go at the member for Murray Plains and also at the member for South Barwon. The minister was having a go at various members over here, saying that they do not know anything about water, so I was interested to read in today's *Weekly Times* a headline 'Neville cops barrage of criticism over knowledge'. The article states:

Irrigators jeered Victorian water minister Lisa Neville at a public forum last week over an apparent lack of knowledge of her portfolio.

Ms Neville twice stumbled over questions about the barrages in the lower reaches of the Murray River, saying she did not know what they were.

Now that is astounding. If anyone has ever had any debate or discussion over water in the Murray-Darling Basin, and if you were asked, 'What are the top three or four issues?', you would say, 'The Barmah Choke, the Menindee Lakes and the barrages on the lower Murray'. For the minister to not even know what they are is an absolute disgrace, and it just shows how little she understands her portfolio. That has been brought out in this decision to turn on the desalination plant.

What I want to turn to now is of course the justification, and we have heard lots from those opposite about drought and about low inflows, and all those sorts of things, but the simple fact of the matter is that Melbourne's storages are currently at 63 per cent of capacity — that is nearly two-thirds for any of those over there who are a little bit mathematically challenged — —

Mr McCurdy interjected.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — They are 63 per cent full, member for Ovens Valley. The government has said that this is a critically low figure. The government has said that 63 per cent is critically low, and I want to go to that in a moment, but first here is a comparison with a few things that are actually critically low: 2.9 per cent of state government infrastructure funding going to country Victoria — that is critically low, and that is what this government has delivered; 3 per cent of the port sale proceeds is what this government wanted before The Nationals and the Liberals got in and made it honest — 3 per cent, that is critically low. There are a few other things that are critically low: union membership in Australia is at 15 per cent or just 11 per cent in the private sector — now that is critically low. And I see the member for Frankston smiling because he is a union member as well. Bill Shorten's net approval rating — —

Mr Edbrooke — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think the member has strayed far from the subject. He is now talking about the water in the port and not the water that we are talking about. I ask that you bring him back to the matter of public importance.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am talking about 'critically low', which is the key issue that the government has used in relation to the desalination plant.

Mr Foley — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I think the honourable member's reference to 'critically low' should be restricted to at least what was in the matter of public importance proposed by the Leader of The Nationals, which of course was water.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ryall) — Order! Given the context, I will allow the member to continue, but I will take close note of his contribution.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Thank you, Acting Speaker. The actual matter of public importance talks about deceiving country Victorians, so I am talking about the perception that is here. For the purposes of *Hansard*, be aware that there is some sarcasm as I continue, so if you are reading this in future times do not read it directly.

Here are some figures that are 63 per cent which you might consider critically low. Alastair Clarkson has a 62.9 per cent winning record. Having won the last three flags, the Hawthorn footy club should have a look at getting rid of this bloke, because his performance is critically low! The Western Bulldogs footy club last year had a 63 per cent winning record, and it finished sixth out of 18, and that is apparently critically low! Sixty-three per cent of Australian adults are obese or overweight, so clearly we need to get more people fattened up, because that figure is critically low too!

Mr McGuire interjected.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I am pleased to see the member for Broadmeadows has joined us, because his primary vote is 64.17. Now, the member for Broadmeadows is probably okay but had better be careful: he is slipping towards critically low!

Importantly, the member for Murray Plains, who proposed this, had a primary vote of 63 per cent. I pointed this out to the member last night. I said, 'This is something that you should be concerned about — it's critically low!'. He said, 'Well, can I borrow your phone? I want to ring my campaign manager and do something about it, because I'm concerned'. So I grabbed my phone, I had a look at it and I saw on my phone that the battery was at 63 per cent. I said, 'Sorry, Walshie, I can't let you have it. I'm gonna have to plug it in now because it's critically low at the moment and I really, really need to make sure it's built up!'. This is the absurdity that we have got from this government. It is absolutely a joke.

I must add that the minister for water on two-party preferred is at 55 per cent. She is gone! She is in real trouble! She is way below critically low! I think it is just an absurdity that we have turned on the desalination plant at this level. This talk of a crisis, of reserves being critically low, is absolute bunkum. Labor is spinning its way merrily through this issue to justify its massive desalination white elephant at great cost to the people of Victoria.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

VICTORIA POLICE AMENDMENT (MERIT-BASED TRANSFER) BILL 2016

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) — Thank you very much, Acting Speaker Ryall. It is a great pleasure to rise on this bill, the Victoria Police Amendment

(Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. The coalition, of course, is in favour of merit-based promotion and development, and it is a good thing that we find that in this piece of legislation. But of course, Acting Speaker Angus — a different Acting Speaker — there are many other things that this government could be focusing on to do with police.

One thing that the government could be looking at more seriously is the rampant bullying that is taking place within Victoria Police. Certainly I have a range of constituents who are either still being bullied or have been bullied out of the police force, and that is something that I think we all in this house should take very seriously. I think experience would show that even MPs, even those in ministerial positions, when they are exposed to the types of situations that police face every day, find them more difficult to deal with than they expected, so what must it be like for our brave police officers who face these situations every day and are expected just to turn up and face them again?

Certainly in my electorate I have had a couple of police officers who were involved in a murder in Hastings and then not very long later had to front up in Tyabb for the very, very tragic death of young Luke Batty. Those people have to deal with that for the rest of their lives. Not only that — and I do not mean ‘only’ to belittle it — but on top of that then having to act to remove the danger of Luke’s father by shooting him is something that will stay with those police officers for the rest of their lives. So this is something that this government needs to take very, very seriously.

Gordon Charteris in my electorate is somebody who certainly springs to my mind when I talk about bullying within the police force. Having a 36-year decorated history with police, the last time he raised the problem of police numbers was the last time the Labor Party was in government and had reduced Victoria Police to having the lowest per capita numbers of any police force in Australia — it has claimed that title again — and when he raised it he was bullied very, very quickly out of the force. That is something that should never be put up with by our community, by this Parliament and by the government. But the government seems to lose its voice when things like that occur, and we certainly need to be making sure that we take action on that straightaway.

Just on that, it was interesting listening to a number of members raise in hushed tones the ‘wonderful chief commissioner’ who was in place at the time — that was Christine Nixon. To hear people still going on that Christine Nixon was the best chief commissioner this state has ever seen is, I think, an insult to the police

force and an insult to Victorians, because everybody outside this place knows that just was not the case.

Mr Pearson interjected.

Mr BURGESS — I’ve got interjections over there, have I? The member for Essendon, I believe, was interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Angus) — Order! Through the Chair!

Mr BURGESS — Yeah? The member is shaking his head now. Nothing to say?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Angus) — Order! The member for Hastings will direct his remarks through the Chair.

Mr BURGESS — Through the Chair, Acting Speaker, the member for Essendon was, I think, saying that he believed that former Chief Commissioner Nixon was the best chief commissioner.

Mr Pearson — A great chief commissioner.

Mr BURGESS — Was ‘a great chief commissioner’, he says — that Christine Nixon was a great chief commissioner. That is certainly something I would not want to have on my record in *Hansard*, but the member for Essendon seems quite happy to do that. He is now encouraging me to repeat it again, but that is enough. I think we already know where the member for Essendon stands on that.

I move on to some of the other things that this government is well known for. It is certainly well known for its soft-on-crime approach. That is probably why it was so keen on having Christine Nixon as the chief commissioner, because certainly when you listened to the police at that time, and even again now, you find they are very concerned about the policies that are being thrust upon them — for instance, not being able to pursue and the lack of discipline they are seeing coming through. It certainly is being reflected throughout my community as it is throughout the rest of Victoria with crime rates being up 6 per cent in the 12 months to 30 September 2015. The total number of recorded offences has gone from 455 728 up to 482 959. Drug possession is up 16.9 per cent. Now why would that be? It is because there are not enough police out there on the beat. That is because when the coalition left government the ball was dropped well and truly by this government because it just does not believe in law and order; it just does not believe in having police out there on the beat.

Weapons and explosives offences have gone up 16.1 per cent from 13 175 to 15 290. Family incidents are up 9.6 per cent from 66 000 to 72 376. Again, that is something that must be ringing alarm bells on the other side of this chamber. Why are people not standing up? We talk and talk about domestic violence, but why are we not jumping up and down about such a dramatic rise in domestic violence over that period of time? Stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour are up 9.4 per cent from 11 066 to 12 104. Offender incidents are up 6.8 per cent from 154 445 to 164 941. These are all damning statistics. They are statistics that indicate we should be looking at the way we are policing this state and working out what we have done wrong.

It is pretty clear what we have done wrong. After the coalition government put on nearly 2000 new police officers and 950 protective services officers, which is certainly a policy that has been welcomed with open arms by the Victorian public, things have changed dramatically with the election of the Andrews government. The training of new police is basically at a standstill; it is not even keeping up with attrition. It is no wonder that we are having difficulty out on the streets.

When you look at the numbers out on the streets, and if you take places like my electorate and certainly in the area of Casey — Casey, as everyone knows, is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia, taking quite a large part of that extra 100 000 people we get into Victoria every year — crime is up quite dramatically. It is continuing to skyrocket along with the population, as you would expect, but what has been the action of this government? It has gone from 156.89 police officers in Casey when the coalition government left power to 148.79 police officers now. That is certainly counterintuitive. If you have got more people going into the area and if you have got growing crime, why would the government not be making sure that there were enough police officers? In fact it is reducing the number of police officers in that area. It is certainly something that I think is a major surprise to this side of the Parliament, and something that I do not think that those on that side are asking questions about.

I have had public meetings in Tooradin and I have one coming up in Hastings. The community is starting to get very, very uncomfortable with what is happening out on the street with the level of crime and with assaults. You only have to turn on the radio in the morning and you will hear Neil Mitchell going on about the level of break-ins and aggravated burglaries. Aggravated burglary is a very serious offence. Burglaries are occurring when someone is in the house, which can obviously lead to conflict and sometimes to

very, very serious outcomes, and yet nothing is being done. We have got a government that is enforcing a police way of operation that is taking away our police stations. We are having police stations closed or reduced in hours all over the state. It is something that, incidentally, the Premier promised would not happen.

The community of Somerville, for instance, had been asking for a police station in Somerville for over 15 years. It was promised to them before three separate elections, and because the Labor Party was voted in, the community did not get it. But in 2010 the promise was lived up to and the police station was built. It had everything the police station needed, including a letter from Ken Lay, and as late as October before the election it was saying that it was ready to go and the Somerville community could relax because they were getting their police station, and all of a sudden there was a change of government and there is a new way of policing and we do not use police stations anymore. In fact I believe the statement was that police stations were only good for having statutory declarations signed. That is a statement that is reflective of how this government sees law and order. It does not understand how important police stations are to the Victorian community, and until it gets that message we are going to have great difficulty reducing crime throughout this community.

Ms RYAN (Euroa) — It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon to talk about the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016 and to follow the very entertaining contribution on the matter of public importance by the member for Gippsland South. This bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013 to change the way police are selected for country-based general duties. At the moment general duties police officers, as previous speakers have outlined, put forward an expression of interest if they wish to be stationed at a particular location. When that position becomes available, the position is offered to the police officer highest on the list. Under this bill there will be a performance and merit-based selection process introduced. It is my understanding that that has been the result of enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations between the Police Association Victoria and Victoria Police, and that it is obviously supported by both parties. I welcome the greater transparency that this selection process will give, and of course the new rights of appeal that police will have in being able to apply to the Police Registration and Services Board if they wish to question a particular decision.

It takes a very special person to be a general duties police officer in country Victoria. I do want to acknowledge the wonderful work done by police across

my area and across country Victoria more broadly. In my area my local police commander is Dan Trimble and the divisional commander in Benalla is Darren McGrillen. Senior Sergeant Mark Byers is there as well. I have had quite a lot of dealings with them in the first 16 months that I have been in office and they have been absolutely fantastic to work with.

Of course, we also have a number of one-man police stations. We have people like Ricky Keats at Murchison and Pat Storer at Violet Town, who is also a Shire of Strathbogie councillor. Those police officers do an extraordinary job, particularly the ones who are working in one-man police stations. They are not just police officers but also community leaders. I had an instance last year where I needed the involvement of local police, and they were incredibly professional and supportive. I do want to place on record my thanks to them for that, particularly Detective Shannon Myers at Benalla police. He was absolutely wonderful to work with.

Country police are not just there to enforce the law or to protect the community and they do not just deal with crime, although police in my area certainly had a busy time last year when they got roped in to chase Gino and Mark Stocco over half of rural Victoria. They also deal with road accidents. That is so much harder in a small community where so often you know the person who is involved and you have to inform family, with all the difficulties associated with that. There is family violence as well, and the police are there in times of emergencies and floods. So being a general duties police officer in country Victoria is certainly no easy task. Like rural MPs, they have large distances to cover, and they are stretched.

On that point, I do want to talk about resourcing. I am very proud of the record that the coalition had whilst in government in terms of resourcing our country police. We obviously went to the 2014 election with a commitment to employ 1800 additional police officers, and we ended up with somewhere around 1900. There was as well, of course, a commitment to employ protective services officers and put them on metropolitan train stations.

I well remember the context of those election commitments, because during that time I was working for the Leader of The Nationals, who was then also the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I remember the concerns of the police association at the time that funding for police under the Brumby government had dropped to the lowest per capita of any state or territory in Australia and that police patrols had actually declined by more than 20 per cent. In some

areas it was up to 48 per cent. Violent crime was at record levels. My greatest concern now is that we are beginning to see a return to form by the Labor Party. We are actually going backwards in terms of police resourcing in this state.

We all understand, particularly in country areas, the reasons why Victoria Police may have introduced a two-up policy and we all want the very best in terms of safety for our police officers, but the reality is if the police are going to introduce that policy then the government needs to back that up with resourcing. Victoria's population is growing at about 100 000 people a year, but the government is not employing any additional police to meet that need. Across my area it is causing great concern, that we will see police increasingly being pulled out of country Victoria to plug gaps in growth areas and interface areas where the population is rapidly growing.

In recent weeks I have had an example of that in Rushworth. My local Neighbourhood Watch group wrote to me several weeks ago to express concern about its police station, which was originally designed for two police officers and also has a police residence. Those police officers in recent times have actually been dragged out of the town. One has been assigned to Bendigo and the other one is stationed in Rushworth only part time and is covering other general duties around the Shire of Campaspe. Whilst the community understands that they are attempting to cover Rushworth as best they can, the reality is that they are stretched and they simply do not have the resources that they require to ensure the safety of that town. There is a very similar situation at the one-man police station down the road in Stanhope. That means that now in Rushworth, particularly when there is an officer on leave, the community is exposed to a 30-minute wait for someone to come from Kyabram to address a call-out or another incident. I will just read what the Neighbourhood Watch group has written to me:

This often means, in the case of rowdy dangerous driving, the event has either cooled down or the suspects have moved to another location. The more sinister act of burglary, however, quietly takes place. Shopkeepers in our business precinct have been plagued by burglary with some having been hit more than once.

So it is a serious issue in that community. It is certainly worth the government taking another look at its commitments around resourcing in terms of additional police numbers.

It is of course also important that we provide our police with the facilities that they need. Again, an issue I have raised previously in this house is that the Benalla police

station is one of the oldest in the state. It was built in 1956 and it is well overdue for an upgrade. We developed the plans for it over the last four years, and it was ready to be funded. Victoria Police put it forward as a budget and economic review committee bid to government in last year's budget, but it was knocked back. That is a serious issue for the police officers who work at that station. The building is full of asbestos and mould, and it has very poor facilities for female staff. Again, if we wish to attract people and we wish country Victoria to be seen as a great location for general duties police officers to actually put in for a transfer to and to come and work in our region, we need to make sure that we are giving them the facilities that they need in order for them to want to do that.

I was hoping that the acting police minister might be at the table. He was here earlier, before the lunch break. I have invited him to come and see the Benalla police station, and I am still waiting for him to come back to me on that invitation. I do look forward to having the acting police minister come and visit that police station with me before the budget, because that is an important priority.

I conclude by saying that the steps to improve transparency around the selection process for where and how general duties police officers are allocated in country Victoria are very, very important. But Labor really should demonstrate that its support for country police and for country communities extends beyond that, and it needs to put its money where its mouth is and actually fund the resourcing of police adequately in country Victoria. At the moment that simply is not happening.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) — I rise to make a contribution on the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. This bill is actually very specific. It is simple, and as a result it is also short. The bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013 in relation to the transfer of certain police officers. By doing so it facilitates the merit-based transfer of police officers to country general duties positions. When we talk about country general duties positions, we are actually talking about the roles of constables and senior constables. The position of the opposition is that it will not be opposing this bill.

The purpose of this bill is to make changes to the process of transferring officers to non-metropolitan positions of constable and senior constable. Along with this, it changes the appeal process, which will allow police officers a right of appeal that does not exist currently. To put context around this, it is part of an enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) negotiation. As

we all know, the EBAs are negotiated pretty well on a four-yearly basis. In December last year an in-principle agreement was reached. The Chief Commissioner of Police and the Police Association Victoria were happy with the outcome, and the changes that are before the house now reflect a component of that agreement.

This component is about the merit-based transfer of police officers to country general duties positions, as I have said, and the rules that already exist within the legislation, which is why a legislative change is required. I think it makes good sense to have these positions filled under a merit-based system. It would be a concept that is quite foreign to those opposite, who every time we put forward governance changes to include skills capability and merit seem to oppose them and knock them back, so I am pleased that this bill has come before the house. I note that it is being rolled out in country areas only, and it seems to me that there are some reasons for that.

The current practice is that if you wish to transfer to one of those roles in a country station — that may be because you grew up in the country and you are very keen to go back and live in that area — you go through an expression of interest process. You put your name on that list, and when you get to the top of the list you get the gig, regardless of other factors, so this change to a merit-based approach opens the process up to more competition.

If you look at the amendments being made by the bill in a little more detail and give some thought to what they mean and whether they are reasonable, of course a merit-based system is reasonable. I think it is reasonable not just for Victoria Police but also for members of the police force. They have the potential to, and I hope they make, general improvements to the appointment of police in country positions. A merit-based system is certainly a lot more transparent than just being at the top of the list, and I think having a focus on merit and on performance, if we look at the merit and performance space, should contribute to a better workplace culture.

This system will also improve the spread of skills across Victoria. People who have worked in some of the bigger police stations in quite different situations — no towns are the same, and the city is certainly very different from the country — learn different things and have different approaches to policing and this gives them the opportunity to bring some of those different approaches to a country station.

This bill also addresses some of the culture issues that have been identified in country police stations. There

have been a number of reports into policing, certainly in and around investigating poor behaviour and culture. A number of big reports done in that area have identified a number of contributing factors. These factors include the inability to attract and retain staff from outside the immediate area and the inability to periodically refresh supervisors and managers. It is interesting that there is a low proportion of female supervisors and managers in rural areas — 11 per cent. That is extremely low. The merit-based system will actually assist the police and certainly increase the transparency and accountability of the organisation. That is the case in any organisation where you have a merit-based system and an appeals process in place.

I have mentioned the changes to the appeals process. The changes in the bill will allow police officers a right of appeal to the Police Registration and Services Board that does not exist under the current expression of interest process. I think that is quite good. Also, merit-based transfers currently apply only to more senior roles, so this bill brings the roles of constable and senior constable in line with the processes that already exist for more senior roles.

We certainly know that policing is a tough gig. They cover all hours of the day, often 24 hours a day — not always, because depending on which area you might be in you might not have a 24-hour police station; in fact I do not have any in my electorate — and there is a focus on protecting communities, keeping us safe and being able to respond quickly. That responsiveness is something that people look for all the time, and if they have to wait for a very long time for a vehicle to attend, sometimes they can lose a bit of faith in the force, and we do not want that happening at all.

The nature of society is very much changing. It was quite distressing to read that there are a number of no-go zones for ambulance officers now. They will not go into some areas or to some streets or addresses without a police presence. When we think about ambulance officers worrying about attending an incident, we know that that is also putting police officers, who are of course better protected, in a hostile environment as well. We know that there are a lot of weapons and drugs, and we certainly hear about lots of shootings and knife attacks these days. When someone works in the one area all of the time, that has its pros and cons, and I think one of the cons is the danger of becoming stale.

One of the things I want to comment on is that in this government's last budget there was certainly no commitment to additional police officers, and I know there are less police officers on the ground now than at

the time of the election. This puts a lot of pressure on the police force. There is obviously natural attrition, but when you are looking at changing the culture — and the merit-based transfer system is one way that can help change cultures in country areas — you have a whole lot of other factors impacting on the morale of police officers at all levels. That can certainly create a culture where they feel that no-one is taking any notice of their needs.

Police now have to go two up, and of course that is very important for their safety. We know that the changing global environment has meant that we have these changes, but along with that there should be an increase in the numbers of police who are available. The fact is that because of this they are sometimes unable to pursue offenders, and many police have talked to me about how difficult that makes their job. We have had closures of police stations by the government, almost by stealth, and we have had a reduction in services as well. I know the secretary of the Police Association Victoria, Rod Iddles, slammed the police for closing three 24-hour stations in Greensborough, Epping and Reservoir at 11.00 p.m., and I know that some of those areas have had quite a number of issues.

The attraction and retention of staff is very important to any organisation. You want to keep your great staff, and you also want to attract good people. You want to attract new people to the force, and you might want to attract great staff to your areas. I think when you change some systems and you have a transparent process that is merit based, that certainly leads to being able to support the attraction strategies of the organisation.

As I have mentioned before, I do not have any 24-hour police stations. I have three nearby at Lilydale, Seymour and Eltham, and in fact four if I include Wangaratta. I have 12 stations in my electorate, and they range from a single one-man station at Woods Point, run by Senior Constable Ken Dwight. He covers an area of 10 000 square kilometres of Crown land, parkland and reserves not just in Woods Point but at Gaffneys Greek and Matlock as well. Then you have the bigger stations such as those at Mansfield and Healesville and the smaller stations at Marysville and Eildon. There are police stations at Kinglake, Yarra Glen, Alexandra, Yea, Jamieson, Warburton and Yarra Junction, and I know that in the main their staff all want to do the best jobs that they can do. They want to have the appropriate resources and see appropriate investment in the police force, and that investment in this case is through merit-based transfers.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. As many members have said about this bill, it seems to contain sensible provisions. As per the second-reading speech, basically at the moment we have a situation where all the general duties positions are currently filled by an expression of interest process. I suppose those involved in the police force and the Police Association Victoria do not necessarily like the notion that the police officer at the top of the list gets the job in many cases.

As part of the 2015 enterprise bargaining agreement and in agreement with the Chief Commissioner of Police and the police association the bill essentially provides that general duties constable and senior constable positions at country locations should be filled via a merit-based selection process. That is a sensible initiative and is one that I think all of us are very supportive of. From a country and regional perspective it is important that we do get those police members who have the adequate expertise placed in those regional locations across the state.

I might say that I am a proud supporter of the police in this state. I think on the whole they do an outstanding job in very traumatic and difficult circumstances in many cases. I know when we came to government in 2010 one of the key features of our policy was ensuring that Victoria did not have the lowest number of police per capita. It was a record that we did not like to hold, and it is something that we changed with the recruitment of 1700 new police officers and 940 protective services officers. From a local point of view, I have five police stations in my electorate or part thereof, and I clarify that the jurisdiction of the Moe police station is shared between me and the member for Narracan.

Mr M. O'Brien interjected.

Mr NORTHE — He is a good Nationals member for Narracan.

The Morwell police station and Traralgon police station are major police stations which operate 24/7 in relatively close proximity. We also have the Churchill police station and the Boolarra police station, which is a one-man station. I might say for the record I know a number of local police officers very well, and I commend the work that they do. As I said, they do a great job. I know from talking to a lot of local police members and getting their feedback that prior to the 2010 election those police stations were really struggling with vacancies. There certainly were not

enough police officers. They needed more, and it was a real struggle for those stations to fill vacancies.

I well remember a conversation I had with a senior sergeant from the Traralgon police station in 2009. At that particular time there were 30-odd vacancies at the Traralgon police station, and I suppose it was little wonder that police members were suffering from burnout. It made it very difficult for local police members, and I think that with that came a lot of resentment. They resented doing the job that they initially started out loving and wanting to do. They had wanted to make a difference in their community, but a lot of them lost that desire purely and simply because they were overworked and overstressed.

I am really proud, as I stand here today, of the difference the coalition government made to increasing police numbers. Today those police stations are reasonably well resourced and certainly a lot better than they were in the past. I think it has made a difference to those police members and the whole vibe around the police stations, and for those within the ranks there is a lot more positivity around, purely and simply, because they do have those resources available to them.

One statistic from the Morwell electorate which I am not that proud of is that we score well above average in terms of crime rates per capita, and therefore the work the police do is critical. It is a very high workload that they have, as I said, in difficult circumstances. It does not matter whether that includes attending accidents, bringing criminals to justice, dealing with family violence issues or working around entertainment precincts, the work they do in protecting and serving their community is probably not appreciated enough, but from my personal point of view of course I do.

Indeed I work with the police in many forums, probably like many members of Parliament. We all work with our local police services. In Traralgon there is an entertainment precinct, and we have what is called the Traralgon CBD Safety Committee. We meet regularly at the Traralgon police station, obviously with the police but also with the council, the local business community, including the entertainment businesses, and the community more generally. Over time the police have done a great job in directing some initiatives that have really made a difference in terms of some of the violence that had unfortunately occurred across that entertainment precinct over a period of years. All members of the committee have done a great job, but the police have been driving it, using additional CCTV, holding some blitzes and using the additional resources they have available to them. They have been

able to make a difference to community safety in that precinct.

In the family violence sector many regions have a specific family violence section of the police force that does a great job. While we cannot police our way out of family violence, it is an important component of dealing with it, and the police, I think, on the whole do a great job in addressing those particular issues.

From a road safety perspective I have been chair of the local L2P program, which helps disadvantaged youth to get their 120 hours of learner probation driving. They are linked with mentors, and I know that police are very much part of that program locally.

I was proud recently to be part of the establishment of a multidisciplinary centre in Morwell, where victims of sexual assault can come together on the one site. I think there are five or six centres across the state now. Having talked to the local sexual offences and child abuse investigation team members of the police force I know their workload unfortunately is very, very high. They are able to work out of that facility with the Centre Against Sexual Assault staff and departmental staff. If you think about the impact on them of the types of things they have to witness when they are trying to prosecute people for sexual assault, you can only admire them. They do a fantastic job and a lot of work.

Just last Saturday morning I was out at Boolarra. I mentioned earlier that there is a one-man police station there. I was at the folk festival. I was not singing, but I was out there having a look around. I ran into the local officer of the one-man station, Gary Mills. I think Gary is indicative of a person who has great respect in the community. Gary has been in the police force for over 40 years now and will be retiring in June of this year. We had a good chat about events, incidents and accidents along the way. He is a great person, and he will be very difficult to replace. I did ask him that very question: 'I hope you are going to be replaced, Gary, because we do not want to see the demise of one-man police stations, particularly in that community'. He assured me that was not the case. People like Gary are the salt of the earth. They love their jobs, and they want to make a difference in their communities. That is why they do the job in the first place. Gary is a prime example of this bill, helping to make sure that police officers are put in positions in country stations on a merit basis. It is important that we do that.

Hopefully I will get back on Thursday night to a police service medal ceremony on my way home. It will give me, and hopefully other members of Parliament more generally, an opportunity to recognise the efforts and

contributions of our police members, particularly in our regional areas, where they give so much to our communities.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) — It is a pleasure to rise today on behalf of The Nationals in the coalition to not oppose the Victoria Police Amendment (Merit-based Transfer) Bill 2016. Just as a brief overview of the purpose of the bill, its main purpose is around the amendment of the Victoria Police Act 2013 in relation to the transfer of certain police officers. It provides legislative amendment to allow for merit-based transfers as opposed to the existing expression-of-interest-based transfers of country general duties police officers — that is, constables and senior constables in the community.

At the outset I would like to outline the fantastic work of local police right across the Lowan electorate. It is often an incredibly difficult job to be not just the person who has to be respected, a community leader, but also then at times to be the person who has to book their mate for drink-driving or speeding. They are the people who are first to turn up to vehicle accidents, and if they know the person who is involved, it is obviously a really, really difficult time for those individuals. It is the memories that are created then that they often have to live with forever. They can find it difficult to get through that. It is the lack of peer support because of the lower numbers of police in the regions. It is knowing that if you go to a suspected shooting, which fortunately does not happen very often, that backup might be an hour or more away. Putting yourself in the front line and at risk in those environments is extraordinarily brave work.

I have had the great fortune to get to know many police officers. My parents, Rob and Liz Kealy, live next door to the police house in Edenhope. Currently the sergeant is Dale McIvor, who is doing an absolutely fantastic job. He is a local footy umpire and is involved in the community, and that is something you always see with our police officers. They are involved on school councils, and they are involved on hospital boards or auxiliaries. They are involved in so many sporting groups, and it is just fantastic to see that they have followed their passion for serving the community through their careers.

I think we should all make whatever effort we can to thank a police officer every time we see one. I make an effort every time I see a police officer to tell them that they are actually doing a good job. I know they cop a lot of flak and it is difficult. There are probably some instances that we hear of, which fortunately are out of my electorate, where police are not always doing the

right thing, but as a general rule I think we have absolutely fantastic people in our police service in western Victoria, and I thank each and every one of them for doing a solid job in making sure that we have minimal crime in our local area, that our people feel safe and protected and that we can go about our daily business without any concern about things going pear-shaped. It is quite a privilege for communities to be able to live in that environment.

Unfortunately we have seen a few changes in the term of this government. I am hearing from local police officers that they just do not feel that they are getting the support they require at this point in time. There are fewer police officers now than when the Labor government was elected, and that is putting more pressure on smaller police stations, particularly the stations where the infrastructure has not been upgraded for some time. It might be around the house or around the station itself, or it might be difficulty in getting some stabilisation for the staff as well in that area.

Of course when you compare different locations you compare more than just the bricks and mortar. You obviously look at who you are going to work with, you look at where you can send your children to school, you look at what the health services are like and you look at what the local roads are like. Some people look at some of the options that are available in my electorate, and they choose an alternate site, and that is quite disappointing.

We have also been impacted by the two-up rule, which means that for one-man stations, and there are quite a number in my electorate, there is extra waiting time. Even at the two or three-man stations somebody is on duty and somebody is not on duty, so the period of time for a police officer to wait to go to investigate a report can be long when they are 100 kilometres or more from their nearest peer. I can imagine the frustration this could cause local police officers. They might want to just get in the car and deal with something. Some of them do make that decision. This is having an impact on them, and it is putting pressure on them when the money is not coming through and the training of police officers is not flowing through to make sure we not only keep up with our recruitment — to make sure we are fully staffed at all times — but also understand that maybe we do need more police officers in this area.

It is an enormous shift in policy to say that no police officer can go out by themselves anymore. While I think we always have to look out for the safety of everybody who works in the public sector, there also needs to be an acknowledgement that if you are going to put a policy like that in place, you also need to

supply the resources to ensure that services do not drop down.

It is interesting because over the past three or four weeks I have been contacted by a number of constituents who are deeply concerned that the response times from our police officers are not up to scratch at the moment. Locals are blaming the two-up rule. I am not sure that is always the reason, but that is certainly what I am hearing at the moment. In Kaniva I have had a couple of issues raised with me. One was that the station, which is usually a three-man station, at the moment has only one officer, and not being able to fill the required shifts puts a huge hole in the western part of the state. Obviously there are limited police numbers even further west than that. They would probably have to come across either from Nhill or up from Edenhope or Goroke. We need to look at where the gaps are and make sure they are filled at all times, and if that means that we need to spend more money, then we should do that. We need to support our police.

There was an occasion when there was a domestic violence incident in Kaniva. The whole street was locked down. People were terrified, so they locked themselves in their homes while they could see this domestic violence incident. The police did not come for hours. It was not in fact until later the next day, in the morning, that the police doorknocked to relay their concerns that there had been a domestic violence incident, and it was simply too late. On Melbourne Cup Day in Kaniva the locals were actually locked in the pub because there was someone who was quite violent, who was affected by drugs and who had come into the pub. They managed to push him out, and they locked him out of the pub on the street to wait for, again, an extended period of time before there could be a police response.

I have heard from Lyall McClure about the Natimuk police station. There are similar issues; we have a station which is not manned, and no-one is living in the house. I have also heard from David Lee around the Dimboola issues. There is a slow response time. He had a break-in in his shed, and it was actually a couple of days before police could come on-site and investigate that. It is simply not good enough. Yes, we live in country Victoria. We know that we are not going to get the same response times as people who live in the heart of Melbourne, but it does not mean you wait days for a crime to be investigated.

I want to briefly mention Minyip. The Minyip police station has been mentioned on many occasions because it is a one-man station that is at risk of closure. We have heard the minister come out and say that no one-man

stations will close without community support. I have been to a community meeting in Minyip, and certainly the community want to make sure they have an ongoing police presence there. They are isolated, it is an older demographic and they are deeply concerned that they might be put at risk, particularly given the prevalence of drugs that transfer between Melbourne and Adelaide. They do not want to be targeted as a crime hotspot into the future if that station is closed.

On station closure, we do not want to see closure by stealth. We do not want to see a building which is intermittently manned depending on what the patrols might be. Minyip is some distance from the nearest community that has a proper, manned station, so in terms of regional and geographical spread it is really important for this community that the minister sticks to his word and that we do make sure that the Minyip police station is not closed. Even though the minister wrote back in February and said that there would be a meeting in Minyip by the end of February, we still have not had that happen. I am expecting it is going to occur in the next couple of weeks, but it will be very, very interesting to see what the Minyip community have to say and, more importantly, what the acting minister's position is when it comes to keeping one-man stations open.

In rural communities the presence of a police officer is essential to deter crime. We cannot afford any further pressure on our rural communities that would put downward pressure on our population. We need to support our communities and do whatever we can, and certainly I think a great first step would be to train up more police officers so that we have more police officers rather than fewer police officers, particularly in our rural areas, and so that we can fill all the vacancies that are occurring at this point in time. We should make sure that we have enough police officers being trained to fill future retirements. If we do not do that, I think we are going to see a huge hole in police services in rural and regional Victoria in particular.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms SPENCE (Yuroke).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING NATIONAL LAW REPEAL BILL 2015

Second reading

Debate resumed from 25 November 2015; motion of Mr PALLAS (Treasurer).

Mr M. O'BRIEN (Malvern) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015. This is a bill the purpose of which is to repeal the Occupational Licensing National Law Act 2010. How did we get to this position, Acting Speaker? I would like to take you and the house back to a time when newborn lambs would playfully jump around in the sunlit meadows. It was the time of Kevin 07. It was the time when, like for Obama, the oceans would fall back and the earth would start to heal. It was a time of such great promise, and of course nothing could highlight the new broom that was coming to take over our country and lead it in a new and triumphant direction but the Australia 2020 summit.

Do we remember the Australia 2020 summit, where the great and the good, as hand-picked by Prime Minister Rudd at the time, assembled in Canberra on 19 and 20 April 2008? We had the experts in their field. We had Professor Tim Flannery, who never gets it wrong, who said it was never going to rain again. We can see how right he has been proven! We had Cate Blanchett — excellent actress; I am not sure what she knows about occupational licensing, though. We had this rapport, this two-day brainstorm, this two-day think tank of the great and the good. Some of those ideas actually made it to legislation, as hard as it is to believe. I quote now from the *Australia 2020 Summit — Final Report*. On page 42 it makes the breathtaking, innovative observation that:

Regulations should be reformed to maximise productivity, encourage efficient investment and reduce the cost of doing business.

Thank goodness for Kevin 07, because who would have thought of that if he had not been elected Prime Minister of this country and convened this Australia 2020 summit? Who would have thought that maximising productivity, encouraging efficient investment and reducing the cost of doing business were positive things!

You move on to the top points, and of course the devil is always in the detail. One of the dot points was not necessarily a commitment. The report says:

Early discussion raised the following ideas —

this is about as definitive as anything we got under Kevin O' —

... rapid harmonisation of occupational health and safety, workers compensation and trade licensing ...

It is the trade licensing aspect of that particular dot point which has led us to where we are today.

Following on from that idea, the Council of Australian Governments decided — in 2008 I believe it was — to implement some reforms along this basis about harmonising trade licensing. This was in fact in July 2008, so it did not actually take too long from the 2020 summit in April 2008 to probably the first COAG meeting I suspect under Prime Minister Rudd in July 2008. So that I am not accused of plagiarism, I give credit to our friends in South Australia, because the government of South Australia has a very good website with a page on the national occupation licensing system, and it sets out a fairly pithy background.

Mr Richardson interjected.

Mr M. O'BRIEN (Malvern) — Tom Koutsantonis as Treasurer is not a bad bloke. He would hate me saying that, but we have dealt with each other both as energy ministers and as Treasurers in the past and found ourselves agreeing with each other far more often than either of us would comfortably appreciate or admit.

Anyway, back to the background. The South Australia government website page states:

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to establish a national occupational licensing system (NOLS) in July 2008. The scheme will cover licensing requirements for selected occupations, removing inconsistencies across state borders to allow for a more mobile workforce.

The first wave of occupations proposed to move to the national system includes electrical, plumbing and gas-fitting, refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics, and property occupations (other than conveyancers and valuers).

The web page then goes on to what happens in the second wave.

I will pause at this point, because I am not quite sure what our dear friends in the real estate industry have to do with electrical, plumbing and gasfitting. That did seem a very strange jumble, if you like, of occupations that COAG in its wisdom decided to bring together for the first wave of licensing reform.

I have to say the principle is one that I think most people would agree on. If you have — and this is the if — people with a similar qualification for a trade in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria or South

Australia, why should they not be able to move across borders and practise their profession, trade or occupation without having to again be registered in each different state? We are a more mobile country, we do have a mobile workforce and it does make a lot of sense for trades and occupations to be able to move across state borders with a minimum of red tape. This was certainly a concept which I think did have broad support, but the question is: how do you implement it in practice?

What was interesting was that, while the notion of being able to move freely across state borders to practise as, for example, an electrician was something which had a lot of support in the abstract, when it came to the practical we found there was a lot of resistance. The resistance was not necessarily from the labour side or the capital side, if I can put it like that; it was from both sides. Businesses were quite concerned about what was being proposed, and professional bodies representing real estate agents, electricians, gasfitters and plumbers were quite concerned about what this would all mean, and their employees and employee representatives, the unions, were very concerned about what this would all mean.

I divert slightly to recount a story. I was on a ministerial visit, and I was on my way back to Australia. I think we had just got out of Los Angeles, and I was sitting not at the very pointy end, I should say.

Ms Hennessy — The comfortable middle.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — The comfortable middle — thank you, Minister. I was there in my Qantas jammies, as you are — —

Mr Angus — Not too much information

Mr M. O'BRIEN — I will stop there before the member for Forest Hill gets too excited. I was there in my Qantas jammies, and a well-known union official, who I will not name to save him embarrassment, came up to me and introduced himself. He sat down and wanted to have a chat about this national occupational licensing system, because he was very concerned. This person would be well known to many members on the other side, because he was a Victorian — I will let that cat out of the bag. He was very concerned, because his view was Victorians in this particular trade, this particular occupation, were better qualified than those from New South Wales and those from Queensland. His concern — —

Mr McGuire interjected.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — As the member for Broadmeadows says, of course Victorians do it better. His great concern was why should people who have got lesser qualifications, who are not as experienced, who are not as well trained and who potentially do not have the same safety background as Victorians in this occupation have, be able to come to Victoria without any upgrade to their training or their skills or their qualifications and begin practising?

He was very concerned from a safety point of view for his members but also for recognising that his members in Victoria had undertaken additional training and additional qualifications to get where they were. If you were to have a national system which had the lowest common denominator qualification, all you would be doing is encouraging a race to the bottom. This was one of the concerns that the leader of a trade union in Victoria raised with me in very unexpected circumstances, but he made sense. I have to say my feedback from professional organisations representing businesses in these sectors and my feedback from union leaders representing employees in these sectors was that there was a great level of concern that the detail of NOLS had not got it right.

As part of the NOLS program various cost-benefit analysis work was undertaken, and there was local consultation undertaken by states and territories in response to what was called a decision regulation impact statement. This was done in the period July to August 2013. Again I should say the feedback was not particularly positive, so much so that in fact there was a move to not proceed with these NOLS reforms.

I digress slightly to note that there is a lot of support again, I should say, for the concept of having uniform regulation and harmonisation across state borders. But when this is opened up again, and it will be, it is important to make sure we work out whether states will be required to raise standards to a uniform level or whether states will be invited to drop standards to a uniform level? I think that is a fundamental question which we need to resolve before we embark on another well-meaning but ultimately poorly thought through exercise, which in many ways sums up the Rudd government. I was Treasurer at the time, in late 2013, and this was to be referred to state and federal Treasurers for a decision. I think in the intervening period there had been a change of federal government, and we had the Abbott government being sworn in. This was actually taken off the Council on Federal Financial Relations, which is the state and federal Treasurers meeting, and then was referred to COAG. In fact at its meeting on 13 December 2013, COAG decided not to pursue NOLS.

In the intervening period — that intervening five or so years — Victoria had passed the bill, which it was required to do under the original COAG decision, which was the Occupational Licensing National Law Act 2010. So here we are today repealing a bill which never really had much of an effect. That does not mean that it did not have much of a cost though. I refer to note 8 on page 49 of Energy Safe Victoria's annual report for 2013–14, which refers to 'impairment losses' — the loss of \$656 000 to Energy Safe Victoria. A note in the middle of the page says:

Due to the disestablishment of the National Occupational Licensing Authority, previous work carried out to produce a software interface with the prospective national occupational licensing system is now obsolete. An impairment loss was recognised for the period based on its recoverable amount which was determined as nil value in use.

There we have our energy safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria, effectively losing \$656 000 on computer software which turned out to be entirely redundant because NOLS never went ahead.

An honourable member — Good old Labor!

Mr M. O'BRIEN — You cannot beat Labor for ideas which cost you money and you wind up with nothing.

Mr Richardson — Sign the contract.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — If you want to start getting into east–west link, sunshine, be my guest, because if you think \$656 000 is a waste of money, how about \$1.1 billion? I suspect that sky rail will see many of these more vocal members on a train out of here at the next election. I quite enjoy the interjections from the member for Mordialloc because he is making use of the limited time he has as a member of this place.

The opposition certainly does not oppose this bill to repeal the Occupational Licensing National Law Act 2010, because it is redundant. But this does give me an opportunity to not only point out how a reasonable concept has led to so much waste through not being properly thought through but also raise other questions about red tape.

Now we see that the current government is talking about cutting red tape, and we see a press release from the current Treasurer dated 8 February this year headed 'Labour mobility proposal to cut red tape for tradies'. So the question is: what is this government doing to actually make sure that it does not repeat the mistakes of the past? Because we see that many of the same trade qualifications, many of the same groups mentioned in the Treasurer's press release, are the same groups

where harmonisation was attempted through NOLS and it turned out to be an absolute dud. The press release states:

The Andrews Labor government is making it easy for gasfitters —

tick —

bus drivers —

that is a new one —

real estate agents —

tick —

and driving instructors —

that is another new one —

to get on with the job of building a stronger Victorian economy.

The government will make a range of trade qualifications more portable between states, improving labour mobility for a range of occupations that also includes building and plumbing workers —

these are other qualifications that were in the first round of NOLS —

and pest and weed controllers.

The question is: how do we know that this government will not repeat the mistakes of the past? Well, we do not.

Mr Angus interjected.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — We just do not know that, member for Forest Hill, because this government has a history sadly — and it is only 15 months in office — of wasting money and making bad decisions that wind up costing taxpayers.

We have had an example where a Labor government said, 'Here's a good idea. Let's run with it'. It turned out to be an absolute dud. NOLS ended with everyone saying that this was a hopeless idea because it had been badly implemented and was costing everyone a lot of money. What sort of acceptance do we have from this Treasurer that what Labor tried last time simply did not work? How do we know they are not going to make exactly the same mistakes again?

This is a Treasurer who is a past master at wasting public money. Where was he when the Minister for Public Transport was setting up her own private office — her own private chairman's lounge — at the Bendigo railway station, no less? We have to ask the

question: why is this Treasurer not more in charge of where money is being spent? How do we know he is not going to waste money again? He is nominating exactly the same occupations which were part of the NOLS scheme, which we are now repealing in this bill before the house today. The Treasurer has absolutely no idea.

Now, when it comes to cutting red tape the Treasurer should have a look at what the former government did, because we actually said we were going to cut red tape and we did cut red tape. Hundreds of millions of dollars worth of red tape were cut by the former government, independently verified by the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC). In fact VCEC was so independent, do you know what Labor did when it came into office? It abolished it. It scrapped it. Labor does not want to have any 'independent' advice coming to it. 'Oh no, let's just absorb that into the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC)'. It would not even let VCEC people go to Treasury, because Treasury might actually give some sort of semblance of economically rational independent advice. 'Oh, no, we'll put it into DPC so that we can run the policy outcomes out of there'.

So this government has scrapped VCEC, which had a key role in reducing red tape, while saying that it is going to try to cut red tape by repeating the mistakes of the past, and here we are repealing another bill from another bad Labor idea that has cost Victorians hundreds of thousands of dollars just in Energy Safe Victoria alone. That does not go into all the other money that has been expended by the plumbers, by the electricians, by the real estate agents and by others on a badly thought through program.

Well, there are a lot of other things that I could turn my hand to in terms of money that this government wastes, but this is a bill which should serve as a warning to this government, particularly this Treasurer. We have seen, if nothing else, in the last few months that this is a Treasurer who does not think it through and who does not get the detail right. He does not get the detail right. Thank goodness for this government that the Special Minister of State was actually there to clean up his mess — clean up his absolute mess. I am sure I will have more to say about that tomorrow when that particular bill comes back to this house.

This is a Treasurer who has shown a remarkable talent for getting it wrong and for wasting money. Here he is introducing a bill to repeal legislation representing a past Labor mistake, and there he is putting out a press release indicating he wants to go down exactly the same path again. This should be a warning not just to the

Parliament but to the people of Victoria that you cannot trust Labor, and you certainly cannot trust this Treasurer.

Ms Hutchins — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would like you to consider whether the speaker over on the other side is straying from the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Crisp) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order, but I do ask the shadow Treasurer to continue his contribution and return to the bill.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — I was actually going to finish my contribution, Acting Speaker, but now that members opposite have invited me to continue I am very happy to do so. I thank the minister at the table, the Minister for Local Government, for her intervention, because I was prepared to sit down, but I will give those opposite a whack for another couple of minutes. Why do I not do that?

Let us have a look again at this press release from the Treasurer dated 8 February this year. In a section headed 'Quotes attributable to Treasurer Tim Pallas', he is quoted as saying:

We want to make it easier for people to find work ...

Let us just stop there. One of his first duties as Treasurer was to close down a contract that would have employed thousands and thousands of tradespeople, exactly the same sorts of tradespeople that he is talking about making life easier for, and cutting red tape for. He did not worry about cutting red tape. He cut their jobs. That cuts red tape, I suppose. If you do not have a job, you do not have any paperwork to fill out, except maybe for the dole. That was a joke.

If we look at this government's record on people finding work, it promised to have 100 000 full-time jobs over its first two years. That means that after 13 months it needs to have created 54 000 new full-time jobs. How many jobs has it actually created? Twenty-seven thousand — it is only half way.

Ms Hutchins — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I believe that the speaker is straying from the bill. He is solely talking about a press release and not the actual bill or the clauses within it.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, firstly, as the lead speaker for the opposition I am entitled to latitude, and secondly, I am referring to a press release from the Treasurer entitled 'Labor mobility proposal to cut red tape for tradies'. If that is

not directly relevant to the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015, I do not know what is.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Crisp) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order, but I would like the shadow minister to return to speaking to matters a little closer to the bill.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — The Treasurer is keen on the one hand to repeal legislation, which is about harmonisation, but he says he is going down the same path again. What detail do we have about what proposals will replace this repeal bill should this bill pass the Parliament? We have nothing. We have no detail at all. We have a page and a half press release, we have some pretty boring quotes and we have no detail about what this Treasurer is actually going to do.

We know that under this government's watch we have actually seen fewer people going into apprenticeships, and we have not seen the sorts of promises kept that this government was making when it was in opposition. We know that when it comes to jobs Victoria is getting beaten hollow by New South Wales. We know that the government is only halfway to the actual target of where it said it would be in terms of creating jobs, so where are these people with these skills actually going to work? This is a critical point. The best way for people who have skills to deploy them is to have good well-paying, secure jobs. That is what the coalition is after. We want to grow the economy through major infrastructure projects, and that is the best way to ensure job security and ensure that people with skills can use those skills.

By contrast, we see a Labor government that has seen jobs growth reduced compared to where it was under the coalition, we see a government that is losing jobs to New South Wales, we see a government that cut the infrastructure budget by over \$6 billion, we see a government that blew \$1.1 billion on not proceeding with the east-west link and we see a Treasurer who is prepared to go down the same path again and make the same mistakes again. It is Kevin 07 with a worse haircut! That is all we get from this Treasurer. We do not oppose — —

Mr Richardson — Sit down!

Mr M. O'BRIEN — I am not going to sit down now. I am going to keep going, and I am going to talk my time out. I am going to talk my time out, because I have been so encouraged by the member for Mordialloc. When I hear the member for Mordialloc's interjections, I am reminded of the adage that sometimes it is best to sit there quietly and be thought

of as a fool rather than open your mouth and remove all doubt.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Crisp) — Order! I remind the member for Malvern that it is disorderly to respond to interjections.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — In relation to this particular bill, what we do not have from the government is an answer as to how much money has been wasted in Victoria by this Kevin 07 folly imposed on the rest of the country. I have mentioned the amount of money that Energy Safe Victoria has recorded in its particular account — \$656 000 that has been written off over a software program that is now entirely redundant.

The government needs to come to the Parliament and explain the total costs of this to the government. What are the costs of this to the public servants? How much in taxpayers funds has been wasted, has been lost, has been thrown in the bin because we have a government that simply cannot implement a proper proposal. Where were members of the then Brumby government when Kevin 07 came up with this idea that we are now burying today? Were they out there saying, 'Sorry, Kevin, I think you have got this one wrong. I think this is a waste of money. I think this is a waste of time'? No, they were cheering. They were hoping that they could go to the 2020 summit and that they could suck up to Tim Flannery and Cate Blanchett. They might get an autograph. They might get an invitation to opening nights.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Crisp) — Order! The member for Malvern to return to the bill.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — I am talking about the 2020 summit, Acting Speaker, because that 2020 summit was the genesis of this whole proposal that we are burying today. Labor members were there at the start — not just federal Labor but also the state Labor government. Its members were there at the 2020 summit. They were part of this proposal. They were there at that Council of Australian Governments meeting in 2008. They supported this. Why did they not do their due diligence? They would not know due diligence if they fell over it. They were in thrall to Kevin. That was all they knew. They signed up to this thing in a rush. They did not think it through. They did not care about Victorian taxpayer funds at all. Here we are eight years later burying it. We are throwing a shovel of dirt on the coffin of a failed and doomed idea of a failed and doomed government.

Having made these mistakes in the past, we have a Treasurer who has no new ideas, no novel ideas at all.

All he can do is, zombie-like, climb out of the crypt and try to kick the dirt off the coffin — he is coming back. But as he is burying one bad idea, he is reviving the same bad idea and he is going to do it again. It is extraordinary. It is a shambles. That is what happens when you get a government elected with no policy ideas at all.

Ms Hutchins — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, in the time I have been in the chamber and listened to the speaker on his feet, I have not heard him refer to a single clause in the bill. I ask you to bring him back to the bill.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am disappointed that the minister at the table was not listening when I referred to the purpose, which is actually clause 1 of the bill. Perhaps the minister could listen a little bit more intently next time, so she would not have to make a spurious point of order and embarrass herself.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Crisp) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I notice the member for Malvern does not have long, so perhaps we could wrap this up with a reference to the bill.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — While we do not oppose this bill to repeal the skeleton, basically, of a failed Labor idea, we do sound a very big note of caution. It was such a bad idea that we are burying it, but the Treasurer wants to revive it again. He is the zombie Treasurer. He has no ideas of his own. He is simply trying to revive bad ideas that are already dead, buried and cremated.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) — Only the member for Malvern could get excited about the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015. I could not think of anyone else who would. In fact, if that was a contribution that was not opposing the bill, I would hate to see a contribution that was opposing the bill. Acting Speaker, with your indulgence, I just want to acknowledge that in the gallery we have some great Labor students. We have heard a performance and a contribution that they should not model, but I want to welcome the students here today.

The member for Malvern talked about the waste of money, in his view, on this initiative. He referenced the Energy Safe Victoria annual report, and he must have trawled through that and a few hundred others to try to find something of any merit, but I just need to indicate that the member for Malvern and those opposite may have missed the point that we actually live in a federated system, so not everything is within the

purview of this Parliament or the government of the day. If you do not try to establish a national agreement on anything, you would not do anything ever. I commend Kevin Rudd's government at that point in time for actually pursuing a range of issues around a seamless economy and the 2020 summit. It is interesting that those opposite throw rocks because they never thought of it. Of course not everything will succeed because it is not within our purview, and that is what happens within a federated system. These things sometimes do not get off the ground, but there are other ways of achieving it. I will refer to that a bit later in my contribution.

Just quickly, I do want to address a couple of erroneous comments made by the member for Malvern.

Mr Richardson — Where do you start?

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Yes, that is true — where do you start? The member for Mordialloc is right. I was just going to say that the contribution in relation to the manager of government business really makes me think about how those opposite never really worry about someone who has a position of responsibility and actually wants to be where the action is, firstly, in terms of their constituency, secondly, in relation to their ministerial portfolio, particularly V/Line and easy access to services in the country, and thirdly, as a parent with children and a family. So in the opposition's eyes it is a matter of saying, 'No, no, no — everybody has to work from Collins Street or Spring Street'. That is because in the positions they all hold — all the blokes hold the positions in their party and their infrastructure — they never worry about locating an office where people actually live, where the service is actually delivered, and where the minister and her family actually reside. In this case it is an office that already exists, it is a V/Line office. I think that was a completely ridiculous matter to associate with this bill.

The other point I make is that you do not need a national occupational licensing scheme if you do not have an economy. The member for Malvern did reference jobs, but let us just quickly go back over his record of jobs in the last government. He talked about us being behind New South Wales, but that is the only state we are behind in terms of full-time employment growth. When the opposition was in government, we were behind every state in Australia in jobs creation. Victoria had the highest unemployment except for Tasmania — and you would not really compare yourself in economic growth and jobs with Tasmania. The member for Malvern tries to rewrite history, but I can give him an equally comparable period in the Bracks and Brumby governments when the member for

Malvern's record looked quite ridiculous compared to the eight preceding years of the Labor government, as his record will also look ridiculous in the fullness of time of this government.

The other interesting thing about economic growth — and you do not need a national occupational licensing scheme without economic growth — is that the other side tripled state debt, so there is another nail in the coffin for economic growth: having a heavy burden of debt. Those opposite who claim that this is their economic brief — I suppose this is what they get taught in their private schools and around the dinner tables — but obviously in their four-year experiment, they had the highest unemployment on the Australian mainland — I mean, Tasmania may as well be overseas — they tripled the state debt and had a really poor performance on economic growth. We in this government, 14 months after our election, have the highest economic growth in the country. The national accounts came out the other day, with Victoria having the highest economic growth in the country.

Then the last point I want to make is about TAFE. You cannot have occupational licensing without a sector to drive apprenticeship training and the education of the future workforce. Obviously the opposition presided over a \$1 billion cut to and decimation of the TAFE industry. Talk about a waste of money. My God, look at the amount of money that was made by dodgy providers of what TAFE should have been providing, with taxpayer money being used to fund pretend international and local so-called training providers. I will get back to the bill, but I just thought it was appropriate to remind the member for Malvern that his contribution was lacking in merit.

I just want to quickly touch on the purpose of this bill, which the member for Malvern described in his slightly colourful way and which is effectively to repeal Victoria's involvement in the national occupational licensing system. It is an outcome of a Council of Australian Governments meeting. The bill dissolves the national entities that have been established under the occupational licensing national law and then allocates the savings and the transitional arrangements across participating jurisdictions consequent on that decision. It quite literally repeals the Occupational Licensing and National Law Act 2010.

As we have heard, the background to this was basically a national initiative. The regulatory arrangements for the scheme were established through cooperative national legislation, where Victoria was the host jurisdiction of the national law, and then the remaining states and territories passed equivalent laws in their

parliaments to give effect to the national law. Nothing unusual happens in a whole range of different program policy areas. In terms of the mechanics of it, I understand that the decision not to proceed with nationalising occurred before the scheme was actually scheduled to commence operation, so it is not as messy as it may at first appear and therefore, really, licensees remained and will stay under their respective state and territory systems.

Effectively what this bill does is actually go back in a regulatory sense to what existed before, but I do take issue with the member for Malvern's unfair and skewed analysis about our commitment to cutting red tape and our commitment to labour mobility. The Treasurer and the government have made that point very clear. The government is developing a roadmap to achieve those aims, because they can be achieved in other ways, and in the achievement of those aims, our principal aim is not to dilute the quality that exists within our existing trades and our industries. I think that there are areas that have been mentioned earlier where we are, rightly, at a higher level than other states in terms of the knowledge of our tradespeople and our professions.

The government's policy statement in relation to this is to improve labour mobility, to cut red tape and to maintain the quality and standards of Victorian tradespeople that the community really expect. We will engage and consult heavily with the professional industry bodies. We will consult heavily with the trade unions. I think that is the most appropriate thing to do. It is not something that we would leave to rest there because it did not work in a national Council of Australian Governments sense through legislation. We have already made a commitment at the election in relation to our professional engineers and establishing a register. That is a bit of a down payment in terms of our interest in this policy area, because it does contribute to a seamless economy, economic growth and the availability of important resources to sustain that growth. That is particularly so when you have the agenda that we have, which is enormous — a significant infrastructure agenda — right now and over the coming couple of terms, should we be privileged enough to retain government.

It is my pleasure to support the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015 and to endorse Labor's commitment to labour mobility changes and essentially pursuing those with consultation with the industry.

Mr T. BULL (Gippsland East) — It is a pleasure to rise to make a contribution on the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015. It genuinely is a great thrill. It has been well stated that this bill

repeals the Occupational Licensing National Law Act and effectively abolishes the national occupational licensing system, which is better known as NOLS. As has been stated by our previous speaker, the shadow Treasurer, the coalition is not opposing this bill. The shadow Treasurer did get a little bit excited but he did make some quite valid points in his contribution. Whilst we have this act being repealed, it brings to mind that the intention of the act was to support small business, small enterprises, in our states. Whilst I understand this act is being repealed because the policy was pretty much a dud policy that just could not be played out on the ground, it brings to mind the question of what is actually being done in the state at the moment to support small business. What initiatives have we got, or is there a void there?

I had a bit of a look through some of the acts that have been passed in this Parliament, and perhaps the one which was the biggest topic of debate in this chamber and which has the biggest impact on small business was the grand final holiday legislation. The impact of that on small business, particularly in my electorate, has been enormous. I did a survey on this and had 240 respondents from small business in my electorate send feedback. It was interesting that 94 per cent were opposed and said it had hurt their business. While we are repealing this act, and we understand the reasons why, it would be good to get some initiatives through that do support small businesses especially, from my perspective, in rural and regional Victoria.

The background of this was that it was initially to establish a system that would cover licensing requirements for selected occupations, removing inconsistencies between states to make it easier for businesses and individuals to conduct their work across state borders. The intention was also to create a more flexible workforce. If you had qualifications or experience in one jurisdiction, you could then transfer them into another jurisdiction quite easily, removing inconsistencies. It all sounded very good in theory — or so it was thought — but it is not how it played out on the ground. Discussions in various forms followed an announcement by the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, but it did not play out as he was anticipating. Clearly not a lot of thought had gone into how this would play out past the feel-good words that were issued in the announcement.

The first round of occupations that were to be covered in this reform included electrical, plumbing, gasfitting, refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics. They were the first sectors that were actually going to benefit from this greatly streamlined process. The second wave of occupations was earmarked to be builders and a

whole raft of building-related occupations that included conveyancers, valuers and the like. Following on from this, consultation did take place — we had a whole lot of talkfests around the country in the various states and territories — and it was clear from very, very early on that this was a far more complex reform and there were far more issues in it than the Rudd federal government had initially thought.

There were considerable differences across jurisdictions that were obviously going to be extremely difficult to resolve, and these were being increasingly identified by members of the previously mentioned sectors themselves. When they were told they were getting thrown into this reform there was a lot of saying, 'But what about?', 'But what if?', and 'But what about?'. It was clear that it was not going to work out. A number of states uncovered a whole range of complexities that our then Prime Minister had not even thought of — they had not even popped up on his radar — when the announcement was made. Subsequent to all these concerns being raised, at the Council of Australian Governments meeting in December 2013 it was decided not to pursue this NOLS initiative.

I guess that was the nail in the coffin in 2013: this was not going to continue. However, at that particular meeting the states did agree to work together to develop alternative options for minimising impediments to our labour mobility and our workforce within the states. Having as streamlined a process as possible in place clearly has its benefits for tradies and clearly has its benefits for not only those in the occupations that have been mentioned but also a whole raft of other occupations and businesses, particularly those which have operations in two states or more, where they need to transition their workforces to where the work is.

So it is important to those people that they have a level of flexibility, but it is also particularly important for those electorates like mine that border other states. We have tradespeople who live in the communities near our borders who would greatly benefit from having a far more streamlined process so that when they jump over the border to do their plumbing, build a house, do their electrical work or do whatever professional work it might be they do not have these complexities and bureaucratic issues popping up. It is pretty much a headache for small business to have to comply with differing regulations. Workers should be able to travel across borders, undertake their work and earn an income with as little bureaucratic interference as possible. Similarly when a larger company wins a contract over the border — and we have seen that in my electorate in relatively recent times with a significant boat ramp being built at Mallacoota — it should not be

faced with an overburden of regulation that will impact on its ability to boost local economies and impact on its ability to provide local jobs.

In summing up I think it is fair to say that this was an initiative that initially sounded good in theory — they were very, very nice words — but it became very, very clear that it was going to be a lot harder to implement than was first thought. Clearly the words were not backed up by a lot of thought at the time or a lot of research into how this would play out. I conclude my contribution by restating that whilst the coalition does not oppose this repeal bill because of the simple fact that it does not oppose the repeal of bad policy, what we would like to see is a raft of policies, initiatives and announcements that actually do support small businesses. There is a big void in that space at the present time. The one initiative that has been taken, as I said earlier in my contribution, was introducing another public holiday, which has caused a great impost on small business and has hurt a lot of small businesses, and we would like to see some positive news for our small business sector in this state.

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) — I am pleased to make a contribution on the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015. In particular I go to comments in relation to Victoria being the host jurisdiction for the national legislation. The outcome of this bill of course will be to finalise the process for ending this scheme, including allowing other jurisdictions to repeal their legislation and to also allow the terms of existing board members to expire without requiring the Council on Federal Financial Relations to reappoint people to a non-operational organisation. While there are numerous state governments that are continuing to investigate labour mobility reforms, a national scheme will need to be reworked and revisited. We know that the repeal of the national occupational licensing system (NOLS) has no economic impact on Victoria and does not increase the legislative burden, which is welcome. It simply acknowledges the reality of NOLS and provides for the administrative details associated with its abandonment.

Victoria currently provides for labour mobility through mutual recognition practices, which are administered through state agencies such as the Victorian Building Authority and Consumer Affairs Victoria. These are agencies that issue licences based on recognition of similar licences in recognised jurisdictions along with proof of identity and residency. This system can sometimes function as a barrier to labour mobility due to the costs and wait periods that are required. So Victoria is now seeking to pursue its own reform agenda regarding occupational licensing. We will do this particularly in consultation with neighbouring

states, as well as with industry and of course unions. That will not require a national agreement. Some of these reforms are able to be done in 2016 while others will require further consultation with stakeholders.

The reform agenda will also require the expansion and refinement of automatic mutual recognition approaches, as well as skilled harmonisation with neighbouring states. In particular I notice that automatic mutual recognition exists currently in a piecemeal fashion across the various states, and that is where no application process is required for a certain licence to be recognised as valid in Victoria.

The road map initially is looking at implementing reforms for a number of professions depending on whether it is appropriate in that particular case, especially whether other jurisdictions match Victoria for the quality of requirements and qualifications. This gives us an opportunity to look at a greater number of occupations than would have initially been covered under NOLS. The purpose of the reform is of course to reduce costs and red tape for those numerous business and employees who ply their trade in areas near the border. We hear a lot about cross-border issues, as I am sure Acting Speaker Crisp will be very familiar with, as would several other members in this place.

The reforms proposed for these workers range from minor adjustments to significant expansions of recognition practices. Work is also ongoing to extend reform of other occupations that are not addressed in the initial road map of reform. The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, speaking of stakeholders, is an industry specialist in this field and has indicated that the government's actions will help businesses to employ the best skilled workers regardless of where they are from in Australia. The proposals will cut red tape and make it easier for skilled workers coming to Victoria to have their interstate qualifications recognised here. The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry has also noted that it welcomes the repeal of redundant national licensing legislation, which would have imposed another layer of unnecessary bureaucratic costs and red tape on workers. It looks forward to working with the government to implement these reforms, and its support and its work on behalf of industry and promoting and growing jobs in Victoria are very welcome.

I note also that a major labour mobility reform that the Andrews government is currently in consultation over is the recognition of engineering professionals. This was a pre-election commitment and would involve the development of an accredited scheme similar to that for

lawyers and doctors. Registration of engineers is an industry-supported reform where engineers will be required to satisfy a board of their competency before being registered on a roll of registered engineers. This currently exists only in Queensland; however, the Northern Territory and Western Australia are also considering introducing mandatory registration.

That reform of course would provide superior access for Victorian engineering firms to Asian markets and would also allow Victorian engineers to be employed in Queensland under this registration system. In 2011 there was a report that estimated that a national scheme for engineers registration would produce a net value of some \$7.4 billion at a cost-benefit ratio of 3.14. Undertaking this work in conjunction with other states will strengthen the international competitiveness of our engineering and professional services sector, so it makes a lot of sense that the Andrews government made that an election commitment and is working to deliver that through the Parliament. It is a particular example of how the government is making sure that there are substantive reforms that drive economic productivity and cement our place as the fastest growing state economy in the nation.

These reforms will also produce immediate and tangible reductions in red tape and business costs for business operators and contractors in border areas. What I think is important about that is that it is particularly beneficial to cities such as Echuca, Swan Hill, Mildura and Wodonga. These cities are very significant regional economies in their own right, and they are cities where businesses and contractors may be required to obtain dual certification or adhere to differing standards on either side of the border. These inconsistent standards increase the administrative burden and costs, and they do have an effect — as you, Acting Speaker Crisp, well know — around the investment decisions of businesses.

Importantly, this means not that Victoria has foreclosed on the possibility of participating in future national licensing schemes but that the government understands what is driving its need to show some leadership and take action in relation to these matters today.

There is a general acceptance of the principle that intrastate barriers to labour mobility and commerce are detrimental to economic growth and productivity, so the Andrews government is always open to proposals for a redeveloped national licensing scheme. In a past life, working with a former member for Melbourne, Minister Pike, in her role as Minister for Health, we did a lot of work on the cross-border health agreements with then health minister Iemma from New South

Wales on a lot of the complexities around cross-border issues, particularly around Albury-Wodonga and the way that health funding worked in very complicated arrangements for health services up in that significant border community.

These are always ongoing issues about how you provide certainty and an appropriate culture and regulatory framework for business and private sector investment, but these are challenges that also affect the delivery of services to the community that are provided by government. Understanding some of the complexities that we have dealt with in cross-border health agreements and initiatives, I think you can certainly get a deep understanding of the challenges that businesses face in trying to address those issues across jurisdictions in making decisions about where they want to support and invest in their workforce. I am hopeful that the work we are doing in relation to the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015 will address some of those issues for businesses and for the community.

In summing up in the time remaining to me, can I just say that I did like the contribution in the second-reading speech from the minister, who did make the point, and I quote:

The Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015 repeals the Occupational Licensing National Law Act 2010 and dissolves the national entities that have been established under the Occupational Licensing National Law. The bill also provides for the necessary savings and transitional arrangements consequent to that dissolution.

I am happy to table that document for the benefit of members in this place.

Again can I say that it is the Andrews government that is leading the way in cutting red tape rather than cutting TAFE, in cutting red tape rather than cutting health services and in cutting red tape and not cutting job opportunities for young Victorians. The Andrews Labor government will continue to invest in people, invest in business and invest in communities for the benefit of all Victorians.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) — With pleasure I rise to speak briefly on the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015. The purpose of the bill, under clause 1, is to repeal the Occupational Licensing National Law Act 2010. That is because that program is redundant in Victoria. The key thing that I want to talk about today is around occupational licensing more generally and the idea of national regulation of that. Of course other speakers have spoken about labour mobility, and that is a key principle for why you might go for a national scheme in occupational licensing.

People do move around. To have the capacity to easily move from one state to another, and if they are cross-border businesses, or in fact individuals, having some sort of national recognition scheme is important. Having a unified licensing scheme is a sort of step beyond that.

However, there are problems with national occupational licensing, and a couple of those are really the reasons why the national occupational licensing scheme (NOLS) fell over in the first place. The first is that on the one hand national licensing can lead to lowest common denominator regulation, in which the states that may have strong regulatory regimes in relation to some sorts of licensing may find that people who have lesser qualifications and lesser safety records or lesser experience then gain recognition to operate in the state. That can act as a competitive disadvantage to the people in the state already who have faced higher barriers to get their qualifications, but it can also put consumers at risk, depending on the nature of the regulation. So one of the problems can be this lowest common denominator problem.

The flipside of that is that national regulation can of course also lead to gold plating. That is where we find the highest level of regulation is applied everywhere. A state may have come to a risk assessment that in fact something may not need licensing in this way or that an easier form of licensing may be appropriate, but through coming to a national scheme additional costs are placed on people seeking licences as they are forced to go to a gold-plated scheme that may not actually be of any use for protecting consumers rights or enhancing the regulatory regime.

More broadly, why do we have occupational licensing? The great economic rationale for it is because there is an imbalance of information between the seller and the buyer, and through government regulation, through licensing, you can address some of that by requiring that people have a licence so they are qualified to undertake the work. Recently in this place we debated some changes to building regulations that are for that exact purpose. Other occupational groups that people would expect that an occupational licensing regime would be helpful for would be doctors, plumbers and electricians. Consumers do not know what they are buying when they engage these people, and they would have every right to want to know that there has been somebody who has said, 'This person actually is a surgeon', or, 'This person actually does know which way to wire up my house'.

Somebody incredibly famous once said:

People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public ...

That of course was Adam Smith. He was particularly talking about trade groups. Occupational licensing has been one of the great things of trade associations. Trade associations really like it when they can all get together. They have all got one set of qualifications. Traditionally these were the guilds, so we are talking about the pin makers guild, the hat makers guild, the jewellers guild — all these guilds. The only way you could be a jeweller, for example, was effectively to get a licence by being a member of that guild.

This is of course what happens. People who want to shut others out from doing what they are doing — sometimes you do not need regulation at all — want to tell government and tell people, ‘Oh no, it is only safe if we have these regulations’. Earlier in this Parliament of course we had the great hairdressers bill which repealed the requirement for annual registration of hairdressers, but it retained the requirement for registration of hairdressers in case, as I think I have said before, we have outbreaks of scissor crime or scissor inadequacies.

Again, this is saying, ‘Do you need this?’. I think that was the problem with this occupational licensing national law. There were too many ways in which it was really imposing on the public, on the states and on people who would have to be licensed. It was regulation that was unnecessary. Even this week we have, if you like, another example where we are putting in a new set of licensing requirements. That relates to a bill that will be debated soon, the Rooming House Operators Bill 2015. A new set of licensing requirements are included in it.

I note that the most recent contribution on this bill by the member for Ivanhoe promoted further licensing, this time for engineers. We have gone a long way so far without that. It is not clear to me that putting in more and more licensing regimes is the way to create the kind of workforce that has flexibility, that assumes that you will not just have one job for the whole of your life, that you will need to retrain. By creating all this licensing you have got to effectively re-license every time. I believe that part of the reason NOLS failed was that the states realised it was going to be a regulatory burden on them and on people who were covered by it. It is good that it has failed and it is great that we are repealing that act, but the underlying principle of continuing to have occupational licensing in more and more fields rather than fewer to me is a problem.

With that, I do not wish to stray from the bill or be accused of straying from the bill, and I think I have probably covered the full gamut of what needs to be said on licensing. I support the opposition’s position of not opposing the bill, and I look forward to an improved national licensing approach as we go forward.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — I am delighted to make a contribution in relation to the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015, and I want to respond in part to the comments made by the member for Ripon. I sometimes wonder when I listen to the member for Ripon whether she really wants to be in this place or in this nation in one sense because often when I listen to the member for Ripon she is expressing an aspiration for reducing the regulatory burden to the lowest possible level and about lowering taxation to the lowest possible level. She also talks about paring back the layer of governance to the lowest possible level.

The member for Ripon would probably take great exception to the fact that Australia’s taxation rate as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) is 25.8 per cent. I think the member for Ripon would argue quite forcefully and quite passionately that that is far too high. I would say to the member for Ripon in relation to her contribution that she may wish to go to another place, another country, and look at that as a model. Let us look at, say, sub-Saharan Africa. That is the Institute of Public Affairs’ (IPA) nirvana.

Mr Watt — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is clearly straying from the bill. I am not sure that sub-Saharan Africa is actually included in the Occupational Licensing National Law Act 2010 in the first place. I think we could draw the member back to the actual bill we are discussing rather than talking about sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr PEARSON — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I was merely making an observation in relation to the member for Ripon’s contribution about trying to lower the regulatory burden. I was following her and responding to that in part in relation to talking about alternative governance and forms of government.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Crisp) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. Considerable latitude was given to the lead speaker, but I ask the member for Essendon to return to speaking on the bill.

Mr PEARSON — As I was saying, my point is that we need to be very careful because if you follow the logic of the IPA and the member for Ripon to its logical conclusion, you want to create an environment where

there are minimal taxation rates, where you have minimum regulatory standards and where you have the smallest level of governance possible. I would say to the member for Ripon that places like Ethiopia with 11.6 per cent taxation as a percentage of GDP, Rwanda with 14.1 per cent, Sierra Leone with 10.5 per cent and Cote d'Ivoire with 15.3 per cent are where she wants to take us. She wants to take us to a place where we do not have licensing, where we do not have regulation, where we cut back the level of taxation and where basically the fittest will survive and everyone is left to their own devices. That is the vision of the IPA. That is the vision the member for Ripon brings to this chamber.

The reality is that the occupational licensing — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr PEARSON — Indeed. This bill was auspiced in an environment when we had great hopes and aspirations that we could have a harmonised approach, where you could have uniformity, where it was basically recognised that in a population of 23 million you could have national minimum standards and freedom of movement. That was what was envisaged. That was the idea, that you could do that and do it without compromising quality.

The reality is that as you work your way through a process you consult with stakeholders, as you must do; you cannot construct regulation in a vacuum. What transpired was that as you looked at trying to have a national set of standards the feedback from stakeholders was that they were not happy with what was being proposed.

You have got two choices when faced with this. You can turn around and be bloody-minded and say, 'Look, we're just going to push ahead anyhow, even though we don't have any buy-in from the stakeholders', which means you create and put in place a regulatory regime that is not supported by the relevant stakeholders, which would put them at a significant disadvantage. Or you turn around and basically say, as John Maynard Keynes said, 'When the facts change, I change my mind. When I'm confronted with the fact that this isn't working, I'll change my position'. That is an entirely reasonable and logical thing to do, and that is what this bill does.

We recognised the need to make sure that we listened to the stakeholders and responded effectively, and we have done that. What effectively happens now is that the states will go back to engaging with their stakeholders to work out what is an appropriate regulatory regime which ensures that quality is not

compromised. Listening to the member for Ripon's contribution, she seemed to be suggesting that professional associations that might represent electricians or plumbers or engineers are somehow rent seekers and the notion that you could have a professional association that sought to organise is an outrage. Heaven forbid that the working class organises! Where would we be if the working class mobilised? We would have Soviets being created in the suburbs and Soviets being created in Maryborough. What an absolute outrage.

The reality is that it is fair and reasonable for professions to come together to make sure that appropriate standards are being devised and developed and that a regulator is put in place to make sure that they are upheld. That is fair and reasonable. I say to the member for Ripon that I think she would find there are relatively low barriers to entry to these professions. Effectively you could be like my father, who left school aged 15, went off to work as a butcher and spent four years working as an apprentice before he was qualified. That was seen as the pathway you would go down in order to have a qualification. The fact that tradespeople are somehow regarded as being rent seekers I find personally offensive. This is about making sure that we have got the right regulatory regime in place and that quality is not being compromised.

What we are doing today is listening to the stakeholders. We understand that we had a great idea at the time. We thought it would lead to greater levels of efficiency and productivity, but the reality is that the view of the stakeholders was that it was not going to work. So of course then you go back to the drawing board and you say, 'Right, we'll listen and consult, and we'll devise a new regulatory regime that does not compromise quality and ensures that we are more productive'.

I personally do not have a problem with Adam Smith, and I do not have a problem with *The Wealth of Nations*. I think that the society we are living in is about making sure that we have got appropriate checks and balances because markets do fail. The member for Ripon might disagree with that, but markets sometimes do fail.

Ms Staley — I agree, markets do fail.

Mr PEARSON — The Institute of Public Affairs has conceded that markets do sometimes fail. Stop the press! Call *Pravda*!

The reality is that we need to make sure that we have got an appropriate response in place, and that is what

this bill does. It is about trying to get the balance right. I think as legislators we always must be mindful of making sure that we get the regime correct, that we listen to stakeholders, that the quality is not being compromised and that we try to reflect the times that we are living in. As I said, I have no problem with Adam Smith. He was a revolutionary for his time, and he changed the way that we understood the economy and society. He was in many respects a great product of the Scottish Enlightenment, but the reality is this is not 1770; this is 2016, and we have to make sure that we get that balance right.

Professions need to make sure that they monitor the people who operate in their associations to ensure they are appropriately qualified individuals, but there is a role for the states to make sure that those professions conduct themselves responsibly, that quality is not being compromised and consumers are not being let down. That is what this bill is about. Again I would remind the member for Ripon that perhaps she might want to think about running for another constituency in another country.

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I am here to speak on the Occupational Licensing National Law Repeal Bill 2015. The Nationals in coalition are not opposing this bill.

The main purpose of the bill is to repeal the Occupational Licensing National Law Act 2010 and to enact savings and transitional arrangements as a consequence. The bill provides for various bodies constituted by the act to be dissolved, less the assets, rights and liabilities of those bodies in the state or territory that have been participating in the scheme; and provides for the New South Wales Treasury to act as custodian of the records of the dissolved entities. I think it is worthwhile to talk about the rise and fall of this whole scheme.

I live in a border region, and cross-border issues are always on our minds. For those that live particularly in Mildura and all along the river part of my electorate, there is not a state border; it is just a bridge over the Murray River. However, when it comes to so much of what we do, that stretch of water could as well be another country, and that is what makes it so difficult.

There were great hopes when the former Rudd government proposed the national licensing scheme as a red tape reform, and Victoria followed suit with an act. However, it has not worked, and it is worth probably reflecting a little on why it did not work. It was a problem with the standards of those qualifications for the trades and occupations that were

being considered. That variation in training and qualification standards was quite surprising, particularly when you were looking at a national scheme.

In our particular area the difference between New South Wales and Victoria was not great, but among some other states it was considerable and it did vary from trade to trade. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) sought to solve the problem, which is one that has been very much on my mind. However, later COAG resolved not to solve it because of the difficulties. So we are back at the beginning again, and we are back here for a discussion about where to set the bar on standards in the future and how states can do this.

I am reminded of an example where for many years when I was involved with the citrus industry we pursued bilateral trade arrangements such as Doha and so on. That fell over, so we went for trilateral arrangements. I think that as we go forward to try to initiate this, arrangements directly with New South Wales would benefit my electorate while we work out how to manage the other jurisdictions in coming up with a national scheme. I appreciate how important a national scheme is.

I notice, though, that the Treasurer is going back to do this again with his proposal to make it easy for gasfitters, bus drivers, real estate agents and driving instructors to be flexible. I have a bus driving licence and so too do a number of my friends, and the idea of having to change your visual ID as you cross the bridge has long been thought of as being a matter of great amusement. Naturally it is done at the next stop. Having had the health check in both states, I know they are remarkably similar in their questions, but it is a matter of writing two cheques and having to do lots of various other checks, like working with children.

We have work to do here, and in particular for electorates like mine that border New South Wales and, to a lesser extent, South Australia this has fallen over. It is a tragedy. It is an opportunity that has been lost by its falling over. It is one that I want to see corrected, even if just to add something at the end that says that during the grand final public holiday our tradies from Victoria can duck over the river and do some jobs over there to be busy on the day. It is a tragedy that has unfolded. It is something that needs to be fixed. People in Mildura and along the border in my electorate want it fixed, and it needs to be fixed as soon as possible. So back to the drawing board and hurry up!

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr DONNELLAN (Minister for Roads and Road Safety).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

ROOMING HOUSE OPERATORS BILL 2015*Second reading*

Debate resumed from 10 December 2015; motion of Ms GARRETT (Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation).

Government amendments circulated by Mr DONNELLAN (Minister for Roads and Road Safety) under standing orders.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — It gives me pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the Rooming House Operators Bill 2015. Might I say at the outset that we have only just been provided with the amendments that have been circulated, so the coalition will consider those during the course of the sitting week. Obviously we have not had time to look through them.

Nonetheless, the rooming house industry has had quite a chequered history over the past decade. It has had some interesting publicity over a period of time going back to 2006, when we had the unfortunate circumstance where two people, Christopher Giorgi and Leigh Sinclair, lost their lives in a rooming house fire in Brunswick. It was a terrible event, and as legislators we must do all we can to ensure that we provide protection for tenants in making sure that the standards in rooming houses are adequate. Subsequent to that awful event there has been a lot of activity. Quite rightly there was a coronial inquest into those deaths. We had the establishment of the Rooming House Standards Taskforce by the Labor government in 2009, which was chaired by the member for Albert Park, now the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, who has just disappeared. There have also been some substantial changes to the legislation and the standards over that period of time as well.

I think the bill's explanatory memorandum gives a pretty good overview of what the bill seeks to do — that is, to improve the operation of rooming houses by establishing a licensing scheme for rooming house operators. This is to be administered by the Business Licensing Authority and monitored by the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria. Currently there is no law regulating who can and cannot operate a rooming house. The intention is that once this bill comes into operation, in order to operate a rooming house legally in Victoria an individual or eligible corporate entity will need to apply for and be granted a licence to operate a rooming house as well as meeting other existing legal requirements, such as the registration of the rooming house premises with the council in whose municipality it is located. Importantly only persons who are deemed

to be fit and proper within the meaning of the legislation will be eligible to be granted a licence. I do not think there is any issue with the intent of the bill — that is, with having a licensing regime. However, I will point out some industry and stakeholder concerns during the course of my contribution.

I think it is important to understand firstly what a rooming house is. As you would appreciate, Acting Speaker Watt, it is interesting to see the definition of a rooming house, a boarding house or a backpackers hostel. If one looks through the booklet entitled *Running a better rooming house*, produced by the Registered Accommodation Association of Victoria, it gives a description of what a rooming house is. It states:

Under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, a rooming house is a building where:

one or more rooms is available for rent, and

the total number of people who may occupy those rooms is four or more.

Also, in most rooming houses:

residents have shared access to bathrooms, kitchens, laundries and living areas

the owner and their family generally do not live on the premises

different rental agreements are likely to exist for different residents.

There are also different types of rooming houses. Community rooming houses are generally not for profit and funded by the government. There are private rooming house operators, who operate rooming houses for profit. The Building Regulations 2006 distinguish between small rooming houses, which are class 1b, and large rooming houses, which are class 3. To give a little more detail, class 1b rooming houses have up to 12 occupants and a total floor space of not more than 300 square metres. Class 3 rooming houses have more than 12 occupants and a floor space of more than 300 square metres. The member for Albert Park knows all of that.

Mr Foley — I do.

Mr NORTHE — Yes, I know. You should. Unfortunately over a period of time there has been a lot of media and attention, quite rightly, given to rogue and unscrupulous operators. It is important, as I said, that we have standards that apply. I refer back again to the tragic evening — I think it was actually the AFL Grand Final evening of 2006 — when a fire occurred in a rooming house in Brunswick. As I mentioned, Christopher Giorgi and Leigh Sinclair lost their lives in

that terrible event. While it was 10 years ago, nearly, we certainly extend sympathy to family and friends who endured such an awful, awful time.

Coroner Peter White investigated the circumstances of the fire, and the coroner made a number of recommendations at the time. They were broken up into different areas, but there were essentially 18 different recommendations. Under the heading of 'Consumer Affairs Victoria to henceforward play a leading role in the administration of the Health Act prescribed accommodation regulations and related matters', there were four recommendations the coroner made at that time. One of those was to ensure that Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) had a campaign to identify and ensure that rooming house operators and the owners of rooming house premises certainly were made aware of their obligations around health and safety and the planning requirements of a home. The coroner recommended also that CAV be given powers of search and entry. Recommendation 3, which I will come back to, talks about the licensing regime.

The coroner also recommended that the regulations be amended to require operators to prepare and publish an appropriate emergency management plan in consultation with other agencies. Under the heading, 'Amendments to the prescribed accommodation regulations and the building regulations designed to facilitate improved oversight of the boarding house industry', the coroner made five recommendations, primarily around lease arrangements. They were items such as the provision and display of a certificate that was issued by a building surveyor, the adoption of building code fire safety provisions, an increase in penalties for non-compliance and the advancing of prosecutions in appropriate cases, essentially to endeavour to close down any dodgy operators.

The coroner also made five recommendations around tenancy agreements. A general summary of that was to improve the obligations for operators and indeed to produce a guide — such as the booklet I produced earlier — to make sure that rooming house operators and owners understood their obligations and, more generally, to improve the efficacy of tenancy agreements to also ensure that tenants were better informed and protected within those circumstances.

The coroner also made three recommendations around administrative and legislative changes to try to make the approval system more user-friendly. Because of the way the system works, local governments of course have a strong obligation around the approval of rooming houses through the various acts that they administer, so the coroner recommended ways and

means for working better on compliance with local government, improving communications between relevant departments, agencies and councils and also ensuring that council staff were equipped to deal with their particular roles.

Finally, there were two recommendations around bedroom unit door locks in boarding houses. Of course one of the issues that we have heard time and again is around accessibility to doors in circumstances of an emergency. Part of the improvements in this area was the introduction of minimum standards. Hopefully they have addressed the coroner's concerns and recommendations on this particular point.

Recommendation 3 of the coroner says:

That the director, Consumer Affairs Victoria, implement a licensing system for all rooming house operators with each such business to be managed by a nominee who shall be the person in charge, with such persons to be fit and proper persons having regard to criteria to be established by the director.

In summary I suppose what this legislation seeks to do is to introduce that recommendation of the coroner.

Once the coroner's report was released there was a lot of media attention around it, and I think one of the compelling media reports that I saw at the time and read a transcript of recently was reporter Cheryl Hall's interview on *Stateline Victoria* with Tim Adams, the lawyer for the families of those who unfortunately lost their lives in that horrific fire. I will read some of the transcript, if I may. Cheryl Hall, as the reporter, said:

The families of Christopher Giorgi and Leigh Sinclair have waited three years to find out why the young couple died in a rooming house fire in Brunswick. Their family's lawyer summed up their feelings.

The response from the lawyer was:

They feel that there's three words that might encapsulate what's happened in this case: ignorance, arrogance and greed. And they're very hopeful that no other family will have to go through this again.

The reporter then replied:

Victorian Coroner Peter White quietly agreed with them when he handed down his report this week. He outlined not just a failure to maintain electrical wiring and the installation of smoke alarms in the old building in Brunswick, but also the failure of the local council to enforce building and health regulations, and the continued deception and lies by the owners of the building and the operators of the rooming house.

The coroner found the fire on the night of the 2006 AFL Grand Final was probably started by a faulty light fitting and electrical wiring fixed to the restaurant ceiling below. In the

darkness and smoke, they couldn't find the key they needed to open the deadlock on their door. Despite an inspection by officers from the Moreland City Council, which is three doors from the rooming house, smoke alarms were never installed, a partition that blocked the fire escape was never removed and the rooming house was never registered.

They are pretty strong words, and it is pretty emotive when you read the transcript of that. Again, you can only extend your sympathies to the family and friends of those two persons.

As the member for Albert Park would know, the government of the day instigated the Rooming House Standards Taskforce. I will just read through the introduction of what the task force sought to do. It was announced on 15 July 2009 by the then Premier, John Brumby. As part of the group we had the current Minister for Planning, who was then the Minister for Housing; Tony Robinson, the then Minister for Consumer Affairs; and the current Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing was the chairperson. They were to report on solutions to problems associated with poor-quality rooming house accommodation services.

Terms of reference were provided for the task force, and they were around the adequacy of existing enforcement and registration processes, options for increasing affordable accommodation to residents, finding best practice approaches in other jurisdictions and the appraisal of the need to lift standards and regulations amongst other things.

There is a whole series of areas that are responded to, from things such as what a rooming house is, who lives in a rooming house and what the new trends are. There are a number of case studies within that report and the existing legislative framework. As I mentioned, the existing framework does have some complexities where you have a council endorsing particular provisions of rooming house operators, you have CAV doing part of it, and now there will obviously be a third layer with the Business Licensing Authority assessing those licence applications into the future as well.

We go on to the standards and problems in Victorian rooming houses, and part 5 talks about a plan for action, which some might say is a bit of an anomaly, because despite this report being handed down, unfortunately there was very little activity in the latter part of the Labor government of the day.

Nonetheless, in summary there were 32 recommendations across a whole range of different areas, including around standards, compliance and the enforcement part of it. From a registration point of view, recommendation 15 states:

State government introduce a system of registration for rooming house operators in Victoria through the Business Licensing Authority. As a result, to operate a rooming house legally in Victoria premises must be registered with local government and operators must be registered with state government. This system will include sanctions against unregistered operators and reflect increased penalties for non-compliance with other applicable legislation operating in the sector ...

Recommendation 16:

State government establish a statewide register of rooming houses and provide this to agencies requiring this information to fulfil their accommodation and housing-related responsibilities.

Further in my contribution I will talk about some of the implementation measures that the coalition had put in place, but that was certainly one of them.

The task force report also talks about supply and about managing implementation. As I say, even four years after that terrible fire unfortunately there was very little activity under the previous Labor government.

Mr Foley — Rubbish; that's offensive rubbish.

Mr NORTHE — The minister can stand up and counter that if he wants to. On that basis, I do want to thank the minister's office and the department for their briefing and some of the information they have provided, despite forgetting the amendments, but we will get over that.

Talking about what the coalition government did in its term and some of the initiatives that we did put in place, we can look back to a media release of November 2009. The then shadow minister, Wendy Lovell, a member for Northern Victoria region in the other place, called upon the then Minister for Housing to reveal as soon as possible the minimum standards for rooming houses that were to be phased in so that legitimate operators had enough time to become compliant. That was in November 2009. As I say, there was some disappointment that a lot of those measures did not take place.

Then on 23 June 2010 the shadow housing minister of the day, Wendy Lovell, had been talking about the 32 recommendations of that task force. The implementation plan was supposed to have been delivered in December 2009, but six months later — this media release is from June 2010 — that still had not occurred, so despite the rantings from the member for Albert Park, that was the case. All those implementation plans ran very late, and by the time an election was held there was very little done. From a coalition point of view — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr NORTHE — I will repeat it if you want me to.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr NORTHE — Concentrate. When we came to government we did a number of things. One of the things we did do was to ensure that Consumer Affairs Victoria had powers to issue on-the-spot fines to rooming house operators who failed to keep their accommodation up to legislated standards.

We also implemented — and they became effective on 31 March 2013 — minimum standards. Minimum standards were very important, and again they were part of the coronial report and also the task force report, and included things such as having as a minimum standard that residents rooms have locks on the outside for when residents come and go; that there be two working power outlets and window coverings for privacy; that bathrooms and toilets have privacy locks or latches on them; that kitchen facilities are adequate for all residents and in working order; that the front entrance to be well lit; and that there be general standards providing that rooming houses have fire evacuation plans and good ventilation and ensuring that there were regular gas and electrical installations and checks. They were some of the minimum standards that we introduced. I might say that was done in concert of course with a range of stakeholders, and there was significant engagement from a number of those who supported the minimum standards at the time.

One of the other things that of course needed to be increased was the inspections, so over a period of time there were significant inspections. I have just read a media release of June 2013 which outlined that officers had carried out more than 460 inspections at 275 rooming houses in a period of about three months to ensure that minimum standards were being enforced and being implemented. That was quite important. So over a period of time, as a bit of a snapshot, they were some of the measures.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, a statewide rooming house register was to be established, and that is now available for the public to see where rooming houses are in their own municipality. From my own local perspective, within the City of Latrobe there are four. So there was a lot done under the coalition government to introduce not only the recommendations of the task force but also the recommendations from the coroner.

There has been plenty of media coverage even over recent months. I will read through some of the material supplied. From the *Herald Sun* of 19 January 2015, an

article headed ‘War on slums — Rooming house crisis’. I will not go into all the detail. There was an article in the *Sunday Age* of 21 June 2015 headed ‘High-rise slums’. It goes on and on. There has been a lot of media attention given to the fact that rooming house operators and owners need to ensure that they have appropriate accommodation available for tenants. Many tenants, I might say, can be vulnerable, but there is a whole range of different tenants who might use rooming houses, whether it be international students or students who might reside in country Victoria and need to stay in the city. There is a whole range of reasons why one might stay in a rooming house, and they are critically important.

The feedback I had from stakeholders has generally been supportive. The Council to Homeless Persons is very supportive of the changes that are being proposed, and I will read part of its submission:

The introduction of a ‘fit and proper’ persons check will be an effective method of improving the calibre of operators and therefore, their operational practices.

The council strongly supports the introduction of a licensing regime.

The Tenants Union of Victoria likewise supports the fit and proper person test and a licensing scheme to be applied.

The submission from the Accommodation Association of Australia is an interesting one. It said that whilst it might have had problems in the past with such a bill, its position is that it supports it in principle as long as the direct cost of securing a licence is not prohibitive, the indirect cost of securing a licence is not prohibitive and that there is a level playing field across Victoria.

I might say that some concerns have been expressed to me, and I refer to the Registered Accommodation Association of Victoria (RAAV). I preface my comments by saying whilst it and others are supportive of the intent of the bill and the licensing scheme, the devil in the detail is something that it has concerns about. First and foremost, the association has stated that, from its perspective, there has been a lack of consultation with it in the latter part of development of this legislation, and quite rightly asks whether there has been a regulatory impact statement considered as part of this, given that there could be financial impact upon its members. In particular the association has raised concerns around clauses 17 and 18 of the bill, which deal with the disqualification criteria.

If you read clause 17, titled ‘Application for licence — licence disqualification criteria’, it says in part:

- (1) The following are the licence disqualification criteria —
- (a) within the preceding 10 years, a relevant person has been convicted or found guilty of —
- (i) an offence involving fraud, dishonesty, drug cultivation or trafficking, sexual slavery or servitude, child pornography or violence that was punishable by a term of imprisonment of 3 months or more at the time of the conviction or finding of guilt or a sexual offence or an offence connected with sex work that was punishable by a term of imprisonment of 3 months or more at the time of the conviction or finding of guilt ...

It also goes on to specify that if ‘within the preceding 5 years, a relevant person has been convicted or found guilty of’ a number of related rooming house offences against a number of different acts, including the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, the Building Act 1993, the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012, that fits within licence disqualification criteria, and that has caused some concern. Nobody disagrees with the notion that for those more serious offences one should not be allocated a licence. However, RAAV has expressed some concern about the second element of that — that if there is a transgression against rooming house offences, against the number of acts that it is applied to, potentially you will see a person not being able to be allocated or issued with a licence for what they might deem minor offences.

The second part of their concerns relate to clause 18, which lists the renewal disqualification criteria, which are essentially all the same offences I have outlined in clause 17. Nonetheless, there are a number of examples that could be raised where one might not be issued a licence based on what the bill actually says. If someone has failed to keep documents related to the business available for inspection or has failed to comply with the plumbing order within a set time frame, could it be construed that they would not be a fit and proper person because they have unfortunately met the disqualification criteria? I might say that many rooming house operators do not necessarily have one rooming house but might have multiple. If they were issued with a licence and there was what they would call a minor breach, they would lose their licence altogether. Then a number of rooming houses would be impacted, and therefore the tenants of those rooming houses would be impacted as well.

A number of other offences might potentially preclude one from obtaining a rooming house licence. If you have a look at the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009, regulation 26 pertains to maintaining a ‘register of occupants of prescribed accommodation’,

and regulation 27 pertains to ‘advertising and prescribed accommodation’. There are other offences such as failure to display a statement of rights and house rules in a resident’s room or failure of an owner to give additional information. They are all currently offences that potentially could lead to one not being issued with a licence.

I understand that there are exemptions noted in the bill, particularly when it comes to the issue of infringement notices, but, for example, in the Building Act 1993, section 221ZZC(1) says:

An owner or occupier ... must comply with ... a plumbing order —

so you are actually not able to issue an infringement penalty. Therefore there may be an option for a council — maybe an overzealous council — that wishes to not have a rooming house in its particular municipality to go to the nth degree to have a rooming house operator charged with such an offence. There are a number of other issues about which concerns have been raised through RAAV — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time has arrived for this house to meet with the Legislative Council in this chamber for the purpose of filling a Senate vacancy and electing members to the boards of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Debate interrupted.

Sitting suspended 6.45 p.m. until 7.00 p.m.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Monash University Berwick campus

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Education, and I ask the minister to take action to stop the sale of Monash University’s Berwick campus. This university has a history of problems with delivery, and most of these problems are due to Labor all the way through. We can go back to an article from 3 September 1992 which states:

Political ‘brawling and pork-barrelling’ have doomed all attempts to finalise the site for development of a new campus of Monash University, it was claimed yesterday.

We could even go back as far as April 1992:

Political interference is threatening the future of hundreds of prospective university students, an academic said yesterday.

Now this university must obviously remain where it is. It was a coalition government that delivered it. We can go back to a news release of Wednesday, 12 January 1994, headed 'Casey airfield to be site for new Monash campus'. I remember specifically when it was the airfield back then. It was a fantastic airfield, and it took a lot of work and a coalition government to fix the problems of Labor at the time to ensure a university was delivered for the south-east corridor.

Not only is it a university, but more important than a university it actually has a school for the blind. I note the member for Mordialloc wants to make a joke of that one, but a school for the blind is something that the Labor Party closed, and it is vital that this —

Mr Pakula — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a neat trick, but it is not appropriate for any member to seek to verbal another member in the chamber, and he should be directed not to do so.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Honourable members should be aware of other members and not put words in their mouths. The honourable member to continue.

Mr BATTIN — Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I was well and truly aware of the member for Mordialloc, don't worry about that.

It is also in relation to a school for the blind. This is a school that was constructed during the last term of government, and the member for Narre Warren South was more than happy to turn up when we went down there for the opening of that school. It is a school that we are very proud to see delivered for our local community, and it is one that we want to see continue. The site is actually on Monash University land, and it is vital that the school also remains. We have also got Nossal High School down there. I will read quickly an extract from *Hansard*:

I call on the government —

the Naphine government at the time —

to commit to making sure that the Berwick campus remains a Monash campus for the kids in the south-east who want to go to university, get a degree and serve their community.

The Naphine government did just that whilst it was in government. We ensured that the university stayed. The member for Narre Warren South put that on record, but it is amazing to note her silence going forward. We now

call on the minister to ensure that the sale of Monash University does not go ahead.

Susan Street reserve, Eltham

Ms WARD (Eltham) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to support an application by the Nillumbik council, the Eltham Junior Football Club, the Eltham Rugby Club and the Eltham Cricket Club for the installation of sports lighting at the Susan Street reserve under the Andrews government's Community Sports Infrastructure Fund.

These successful clubs are very important to my community. Not only are Eltham Junior Football Club's colours red and black — the right colours, may I say — but its attitude to its players and its strong sense of inclusion, with three girls teams this year, along with plans for an all-abilities team, are just fantastic. The Eltham Rugby Club is a great multicultural club with a strong focus on family and inclusion. It is actively promoting not only female participation but also female leadership, including at the coaching and referee level. The Eltham Cricket Club last year celebrated 150 years of playing cricket, a tremendous achievement. At the celebration last year we heard many wonderful stories about this successful and friendly club.

Last year the minister demonstrated his support for my local clubs by coming to visit the Susan Street reserve and the facilities at Panther Place. We are lucky in Eltham to have such inclusive, community-minded and successful sporting clubs, which I draw to the attention of the Minister for Sport, and I ask him to continue his support of my clubs.

Mallee education networks

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action I seek is that the alignment of the catchment boundaries for the new education regions, areas and networks be changed to reflect communities of interest and specifically that Tempy Primary School be aligned with the Southern Mallee network, which is within the Mallee area, and the Donald and Birchip schools be aligned with the western region. As I understand it, at present the principal from Tempy will be driving south and will pass the principals from Donald and Birchip as they are travelling in the opposite direction. Clearly this is not common sense as each will be driving away from their communities of interest.

Donald and Birchip look south for their services to either Horsham or Ballarat. Tempy looks to Ouyen,

Mildura and Swan Hill. In fact for Tempy the ambulance comes from Patchewollock, Ouyen or Sea Lake, and it goes to Ouyen, Mildura or Swan Hill. Transition support for the schools in that area comes from Ouyen, Mildura or Swan Hill, and family, cultural, sporting and commercial behaviour is based in Ouyen, Mildura and Swan Hill. The closest medical services to Tempy are in Ouyen, 30 kilometres away, not to the south. Speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, psychology and autism support for the school are all based in Ouyen and come out of Mildura.

Quite clearly there is an issue here. This appears to have come about because of the alignment of these new education boundaries with the Department of Health and Human Services boundaries, which in fact take in local government areas. Unfortunately both the Buloke and Yarriambiack councils are long thin councils with nearly 200 kilometres from one end to the other, so we have a disparity there. There will be the cost that will be involved in this when we have principals and others driving extra kilometres. Principals have got better things to do than to sit in motor vehicles and better things to do than cross each other going to meetings. The action I seek is based on common sense. The minister needs to listen to the local communities and arrange the networks in the Mallee to reflect the communities' needs.

Ballarat sports and events centre

Ms KNIGHT (Wendouree) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Regional Development, Jaala Pulford, in the other place. The action I seek from the minister is that she write to the federal government and request its support for the \$24 million Ballarat sports and events centre project.

This project in Wendouree will be a great asset to my community. Ballarat has 7250 weekly basketball, netball and badminton participants, and this is expected to grow to over 12 500 by 2035. Local sports like basketball, netball and badminton give families the chance to socialise, and they also give kids the opportunity for experiences and for skills that will stay with them for life. The Andrews government has committed \$9 million towards this project, and I am so very proud of that. We see the value in supporting grassroots sports. We also see the value in building up our sports facilities so that they can accommodate intrastate and interstate teams. We see the benefit of bringing visitors to our city through participation in sport, thereby supporting our local businesses.

Unfortunately the federal Liberal-Nationals coalition has ignored this project despite previous pleas from Labor that it provide funding through the National Stronger Regions Fund. This project is just too important to my local community and to Ballarat's economy to give up, so I ask the Minister for Regional Development to write to the federal government and request that it provide its fair share of funding for this valuable project, and I ask that the minister actively seek that funding for this project in Ballarat.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I will take some advice on that particular matter, and I will come back to the house before responses.

Mount Duneed Regional Primary School

Mr KATOS (South Barwon) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide clarity regarding the future of Mount Duneed Regional Primary School. I ask this on behalf of the school community, particularly with regard to the election commitment that was made by the Labor Party for a new Armstrong Creek West primary school, which at the moment is a broken promise. Mount Duneed Regional Primary School has 258 students and has grown rapidly as a result of the growth in the Armstrong Creek growth area. At present all students in Armstrong Creek wishing to attend a government school are zoned to this school.

The school's facilities are old and not up to standard and really need a major upgrade. It really needs funding to replace the buildings. I have spoken to principal Julie Makin who would obviously like to see the school buildings upgraded, but the school community is also of the view that it would like the school to be moved into the new Armstrong Creek West primary school, which is in the adjacent Villawood estate and has yet to be funded by the present government. There are also significant safety concerns for parents and children with the road and parking at the front of the school, which is simply not adequate to cater for the growth in the school's population. This school has grown by a significant number of students in recent years and is also in a semirural area. The road outside the school has gravel shoulders, the parking is poor and there are open drainage culverts, which are a safety hazard.

The coalition acquired land in Armstrong Creek East for a primary school, special school and secondary college. We also funded in the 2014–15 state budget the construction of a new primary school and special school in Armstrong Creek West. The minister has yet to come good on his promise to the Armstrong Creek

West community to acquire land and fund the construction of the new school. Mount Duneed Regional Primary School is now in limbo. There is no clarity for the school with regard to whether it will be upgraded or whether it will be moved as a whole school community into the new Armstrong Creek West school. The minister must provide this clarity for parents, students and teachers on the future of Mount Duneed Regional Primary School.

Sunbury electorate small business

Mr J. BULL (Sunbury) — The matter I raise is for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate and join me and a number of small business owners for a small business dinner and forum to discuss the opportunities and challenges in running a small business.

This forum stems from a visit last year from the minister, who heard firsthand from many small businesses in Sunbury, a number of which invited him back to talk at further length about their life in running their local business. Small business is so often the backbone of our community; it is a provider of jobs, a source of community and the beating heart of a town. Sunbury has some wonderful local traders. They are great people who do their very best to provide great services and products. I once again ask the minister to visit my electorate, and I look forward to having him in town.

Burwood electorate planning

Mr WATT (Burwood) — My adjournment matter is for Minister for Planning. I call on the minister to attend a public meeting in my electorate of Burwood on 22 March at 8.00 p.m. in the Copland Room of the Ashburton library. The reason I have been specific about the date is because there is already a meeting of concerned residents in my electorate organised for that particular day. The action I seek is for the minister to attend that meeting. The reason the meeting has been called specifically relates to a number of decisions the minister has made or decisions the minister may make into the future. This is particularly with regard to the calling in of the Deakin University bridge proposal in my electorate, which I have talked about a number of times in this place. It is also with regard to the Hay Street development, which the minister is currently sitting on. Noting that the Labor Party when in opposition made it very clear that it would not support this development, this is a proposal that the minister is dealing with at the moment. There is also Markham Reserve.

I note that I saw a report recently which had a list of suggested improvements for residential zones, many of which concern people in my electorate. I would like to point out that they include increasing the neighbourhood residential zone maximum building height to a limit of 9 metres, removing mandatory height requirements for a neighbourhood residential zone and reviewing zones across Melbourne for a more equitable distribution of neighbourhood residential land. These are all of concern to people in my electorate. There are others that would also concern people in my electorate and have concerned people in my electorate; people have signed a petition with regard to residential growth zones (RGZ).

Recommendation 23 to apply mandatory boundary of RGZ to be commercial zone or to be within 100 metres of commercial zone or activity centre zone is quite concerning for people in my electorate. There is the recommendation to restrict residential development to prevent underdevelopment areas — in other words, what the government is suggesting is potentially to force people to build large buildings in areas on a block of land they may hold where they may not want to build such a large building.

There is one recommendation here — recommendation 49 — that would require a physical barrier between a residential growth zone and neighbourhood residential zones. This is concerning because of the fact that if the minister is saying that there has to be a road between these two streets then that would mean, if it is a very large street, that you would not be able to have a residential buffer.

John Ilhan Memorial Reserve, Meadow Heights

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) — My adjournment request is for the Minister for Local Government. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in support of the application from the City of Hume for funding of stage 2 of the John Ilhan Memorial Reserve development. The John Ilhan Memorial Reserve in Meadow Heights is undergoing a significant upgrade to become Hume's first regional soccer facility. A new sports pavilion has already been added to make the ground a Football Federation Victoria class A facility designed to accommodate the highest state level of competition — the Victorian Premier League.

Last year Hume City advanced to the semifinals of the FFA Cup, an outstanding result, only to bow out to the all-conquering Melbourne Victory at AAMI Stadium. The games leading to the semifinal played at the John

Ilhan reserve were a showcase for community spirit played in a friendly atmosphere. Unfortunately the semifinal could not be played at Hume City's home ground because the lighting was not adequate for television broadcast.

Through the development of the Broadmeadows Valley Park management plan and in consultation with the Hume City Football Club and Broadmeadows Little Athletics Club, the need for state-of-the-art facilities at John Ilhan Memorial Reserve was identified, including the need for dedicated community spaces to facilitate social inclusion in this disadvantaged community. I call for the minister to support the council's application for this important project to make a difference in this proud Victorian community at a centre named in honour of a favoured son whose family came from Turkey. He rose to become the richest man in Australia under 40 through the enterprise and innovation of his Crazy John brand. He was appointed a business ambassador for Melbourne's north under the Bracks and Brumby governments.

Clyde land tax assessment

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) — My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer. The action I seek is for the Treasurer to raise a land tax matter with the State Revenue Office. I visited a property at 200 Tuckers Road, Clyde, recently to meet with the Corrigan family to discuss a land tax assessment they have been issued with, which is now due for payment. The Corrigans are a fifth generation farming family and provide employment to approximately 110 people directly and many more hundreds indirectly through the suppliers to their business. They supply large quantities of baby cos lettuce, salad onions, celery, leeks, silverbeet and various other produce to our major supermarkets and markets on a daily basis.

The Corrigans put the food on the Treasurer's table and on the tables of thousands of Victorian families. The property is owned by Geoff and Marion Corrigan but was transferred into the Corrigan superannuation fund in 2004 as part of a family asset and succession plan. The property has been continuously used for primary production purposes and is now run by the Corrigan family trust. Due to the rapid expansion of our residential areas the farm is now situated in greater Melbourne and in an area subject to a precinct structure plan, which was completed in 2014. As such, the land is now subject to the more stringent tests for exemption set out in section 67 of the Land Tax Act 2005. The end result is that no exemption for land tax is available to the Corrigan family despite the land being held by the

family since the early 1960s and used by them continuously for primary production.

The Corrigans have been issued with a land tax assessment of \$373 725 for the 2015 year, and now face annual assessments in excess of this figure. This matter draws on two key issues and challenges that we face in Victoria: jobs and preserving our nationwide status of producing quality clean, green food. Without the minister's intervention and the removal of this land tax assessment, the Corrigans will be forced to close their farming operations, putting over 100 people out of work and depriving thousands of Victorians' fresh farm produce. There are simply not the margins in the farming industry to absorb such a cost.

As a matter of urgency I urge the Treasurer to liaise with the State Revenue Office to seek a remedy for this problem. Clearly the legislation was not intended to capture genuine cases of primary production. We seek a change in legislation, a commissioner's discretion or a private ruling to exempt the Corrigans from this and future land tax assessments.

Parktone Primary School

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister visit Parktone Primary School to hear about its future needs following significant growth in its students numbers. It is worth reflecting for a moment on how far Parktone Primary School has come in recent years. It was not so long ago that the thought of Parktone Primary increasing its student enrolments was a distant hope. Years back, student enrolments were decreasing and there were grave concerns about the long-term viability of the school.

Fast-forward to today, and with an inspired school community at Parktone primary under the leadership of principal George Danson we have seen student numbers go from just over 100 students to over 500 students this year. The school's viability and future could not be brighter. At the centre of this is Parktone primary School's embracing of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and enshrining this in the ethos of the school. With the habits applied to an educational context, Parktone Primary students are getting life skills that go behind the walls of the classroom. Importantly, the local school community — the parents, the teachers and the local stakeholders — have embraced these habits and are passionate about the focus on every child and how to get the very best out of themselves. It is a credit to George and the whole school community for leading such an innovative model and strengthening the

school's culture, setting an example for all Victorian schools.

Last year I had the opportunity to join Parktone Primary School to recognise the Leader in Me symposium, which was attended by a number of interstate and international guests right in the local Parkdale and Mordialloc community. The ethos of the Leader in Me symposium was to demonstrate how schools around the world are inspiring greatness one child at a time, and it accords with the educational principles of the Victorian government, which is heavily focused on Victoria as the education state. The event was an opportunity to share the vision of schools like Parktone Primary School and for other stakeholders to learn from Parktone's experiences in striving for further advancement and excellence in education.

Parktone Primary School's change in fortunes and the near 500 per cent increase in student numbers have placed significant pressures on the existing buildings, facilities and grounds. As a local community we need to consider what upgrades we need to provide to support these wonderful students into the future and how local residents, parents, teachers and principals can be involved in this journey. After missing out on major capital works funding under the commonwealth government's Building the Education Revolution program as well as missing out on funding in recent years at a state government level, the Parktone primary community is rightfully asking: when is it Parktone's turn? We all subscribe to the notion that every student has the right to a quality education regardless of their circumstances. I look forward to working closely with the Parktone Primary School community to address these challenges and maximise the opportunities for these students.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister for Education to visit Parktone Primary School to hear about its future needs and to respond to the significant growth in student numbers over past years.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I have considered the matter raised by the honourable member for Wendouree, and I have taken advice on this particular matter. When a member raises a matter on the adjournment, there are two tests. Honourable members can look at rulings on this on page 3 of *Rulings from the Chair*.

The first test is that the matter is addressed to the relevant minister. As I understand it, the Minister for Regional Development is the appropriate minister with whom to raise this matter for this particular funding. So the matter meets that test. The second test is about the

action that is sought — in this case that the minister write to the federal minister seeking the release of some money. That is an action that can be taken by the minister. Therefore that is admissible. It is not about lobbying for the money, which would make the matter inadmissible. In this particular instance the matter is admissible as an adjournment matter, and the Attorney-General can respond to that matter.

Responses

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — The member for Gembrook raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking that he stop the sale of the Monash University campus at Berwick.

The member for Eltham raised a matter for the Minister for Sport seeking support for various applications by clubs at Susan Street reserve.

The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding the alignment of catchment boundaries in his area.

The member for Wendouree, as the Deputy Speaker has indicated, raised a matter for the Minister for Regional Development seeking that she write to the commonwealth government seeking support for the Ballarat sports and events centre, a great \$24 million project.

The member for South Barwon sought that the Minister for Education provide clarity about Mount Duneed Regional Primary School's future.

The member for Sunbury raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade seeking that he visit and hold a small business dinner in the electorate of Sunbury.

The member for Burwood asked that the Minister for Planning attend a public meeting in Burwood on 22 March at 8.00 p.m. in the Copland Room at the Ashburton Library. We have a former Minister for Planning actually in the chamber. I am sure he would attest to the fact that planning ministers' diaries are filled up well in advance of two weeks ahead, but nevertheless I will pass the matter on.

The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Local Government seeking funding for the John Ilhan Memorial Reserve.

The member for Bass raised a matter for the Treasurer seeking that a land tax matter be raised with the State Revenue Office.

The member for Mordialloc sought that the Minister for Education visit Parktone Primary School.

I will convey all of those requests.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 7.25 p.m.

Wednesday, 9 March 2016

JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT

Honourable members of both houses met in Assembly chamber at 6.48 p.m.

The CHAIR — Order! We are convening the joint sitting this evening for three purposes: to appoint nominees to two agencies and also for the nomination of a senator.

The joint sitting of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly to choose a person to hold a seat in the Senate is required due to the resignation of Senator the Honourable Michael Ronaldson. We also have to elect three members to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and three members to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Under joint standing order 19(2), the Chair of the joint sitting alternates between the President and the Speaker. On this occasion it happens to be my turn as President. The general procedure for the joint sitting is set out, as members would be aware, in joint standing order 22.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

The CHAIR — We will commence this evening's deliberations with the nominations for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. As I indicated, we need three members for the foundation. I advise that we are operating under the rules set out by joint standing order 24. I invite proposals from members with regard to members to be elected to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I propose:

That Ms Natalie Suleyman, MP, the Honourable Wendy Lovell, MLC, and Ms Colleen Hartland, MLC, be elected to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

I am advised they are willing to accept the nomination.

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — I second the proposal.

The CHAIR — Are there any further proposals? No-one of great courage?

As only three members have been proposed, I am delighted to declare that Ms Natalie Suleyman, MP, the Honourable Wendy Lovell, MLC, and Ms Colleen Hartland, MLC, are hereby elected to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation for a three-year term commencing immediately.

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

The CHAIR — We now proceed to the second agenda item to be dealt with by the joint sitting, in respect of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation board. While joint standing orders 19 to 22 apply to this joint sitting, there is no joint standing order to cover the nomination of members to this particular board. Therefore the first matter to consider is the adoption of rules.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I move:

That the rules for nominations, which are in the hands of members, be adopted.

Motion agreed to.

The CHAIR — I now invite proposals with regard to three members to be elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I propose:

That Ms Maree Edwards, MP, Mr Graham Watt, MP, and Mr Tim McCurdy, MP, be elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

I am advised that they are willing to accept the nomination.

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — I second the proposal.

The CHAIR — Are there any further proposals?

There being none, I am delighted to declare that the three members proposed on the Premier's nomination, being Ms Maree Edwards, MP, Mr Graham Watt, MP, and Mr Tim McCurdy, MP, are elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Senate vacancy

The CHAIR — We now move to the third agenda item for the joint sitting, that being the election of a nominee for the Senate to represent the state of Victoria. In considering the Senate vacancy, I advise that we are operating under the rules set out by joint standing order 23. I am delighted to invite proposals from members for the appointment of a person to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the resignation of Senator the Honourable Michael Ronaldson.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I propose:

That Mr James Paterson hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the resignation of Senator the Honourable Michael Ronaldson.

Mr Paterson is willing to hold the vacant place if chosen. In order to satisfy the joint sitting as to the requirements of section 15 of the commonwealth constitution, I also declare that Mr Paterson is the selection of the Liberal Party, the party previously represented in the Senate by Senator Ronaldson.

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — I very proudly second the proposal.

The CHAIR — Are there any further proposals?

As only one person has been proposed, I therefore declare that Mr James Paterson has been chosen to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the resignation of Senator the Honourable Michael Ronaldson. I will advise the Governor accordingly.

I now declare the joint sitting closed.

Proceedings terminated 6.56 p.m.