The Governor
The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor
The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

The ministry

Premier .................................... The Hon. DM Andrews MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Mental Health
Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services ................. The Hon. JA Merlino MP
Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop ........................................ The Hon. J Symes MLC
Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Higher Education . The Hon. GA Tierney MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Industrial Relations .......................... The Hon. TH Pallas MP
Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers ............... The Hon. AR Carbines MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads and Road Safety . The Hon. BA Carroll MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and Minister for Solar Homes ......................... The Hon. L D’Ambrosio MP
Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for Equality ........................................ The Hon. MP Foley MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and Minister for Fishing and Boating ....... The Hon. MM Horne MP
Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support .................. The Hon. NM Hutchins MP
Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development and Minister for Veterans .................... The Hon. SL Leane MLC
Minister for Water and Minister for Police .................................. The Hon. LM Neville MP
Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and Minister for Racing ........................................... The Hon. MP Pakula MP
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Creative Industries ........ The Hon. DJ Pearson MP
Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business and Minister for Resources .................................. The Hon. JL Pulford MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth ...................................... The Hon. RL Spence MP
Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood ...... The Hon. I Stitt MLC
Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development ...... The Hon. M Thomas MP
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs ..................... The Hon. G Williams MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing ......................... The Hon. RW Wynne MP
Cabinet Secretary ................................................................. Ms S Kilkenny MP
OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Speaker
The Hon. CW BROOKS

Deputy Speaker
Ms JM EDWARDS

Acting Speakers
Mr Blackwood, Ms Blandthorn, Mr J Bull, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, Ms Kilkenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman, Mr Taylor and Ms Ward

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier
The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier
The Hon. JA MERLINO

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. MJ GUY

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party
Mr DJ SOUTHWICK

Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. PL WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Ms SM RYAN

Leader of the House
Ms JM ALLAN

Manager of Opposition Business
Ms LE STALEY

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Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young
Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Ms T Burrows
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee
Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Couzens, Mr Eren, Ms Ryan, Ms Theophanous and Mr Wakeling.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee
Ms Connolly, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Ms McLeish and Mr Morris.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee
Mr Angus, Mr Battin, Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

Privileges Committee
Ms Allan, Mr Carroll, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan, Ms Staley and Mr Wells.

Standing Orders Committee
The Speaker, Ms Allan, Mr Cheeseman, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley and Mr Walsh.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee
Assembly: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.
Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Mikakos, Ms Symes and Ms Wooldridge.

Electoral Matters Committee
Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.
Council: Mr Erdogan, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

House Committee
Assembly: The Speaker (ex officio), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell and Ms Staley.
Council: The President (ex officio), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

Integrity and Oversight Committee
Assembly: Mr Halse, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.
Council: Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee
Assembly: Mr J Bull, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.
Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Erdogan and Ms Shing.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Assembly: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O’Brien, Ms Richards and Mr Richardson.
Council: Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee
Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.
Council: Ms Patten and Ms Watt.
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Wednesday, 23 February 2022

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.32 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (09:32): We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

Condolences

DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

The SPEAKER (09:33): I wish to advise the house of the death of Denise Allen, member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Benalla from 13 May 2000 to 29 November 2002. I ask members to rise in their places as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased.

Members stood in their places.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members. I will convey a message of sympathy from the house to the relatives of the late Denise Allen.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION AND ORDERS OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER (09:34): I wish to advise the house that general business, notice of motion 26 and orders of the day 8 and 9, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2.00 pm today.

Documents

DOCUMENTS

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT—The Clerk tabled the following documents under Acts of Parliament:

Auditor-General—Business Continuity During COVID-19—Ordered to be published

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978—Order under s 17B granting a licence over Flinders Foreshore Reserve.

Bills

MAJOR EVENTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (UNAUTHORISED TICKET PACKAGES AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2021

SERVICE VICTORIA AMENDMENT BILL 2021

Council’s agreement

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received two messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: Major Events Legislation Amendment (Unauthorised Ticket Packages and Other Matters) Bill 2021 and Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2021.
Committees

INTEGRITY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Membership

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received the resignation of Ms Hennessy from the Integrity and Oversight Committee effective from yesterday.

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That Ms Ward be a member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (09:36): As we have just noted through a minute’s silence, on 22 January this year Denise Allen, the former member for Benalla, passed away aged 68 following a brave battle with cancer. I was the assistant state secretary and marginal seats director at the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party back in 2000 when Denise won a historic by-election, against all odds. I do not know whether it really was a marginal seat, to be honest, but given her local profile, her determination, her empathy and the fact that she connected with people so easily and so genuinely, we were very pleased—and no-one more than her—to secure that victory and an additional vote for the Bracks government in a very tight Parliament. I think all of us will think about Frankston East, Burwood and Benalla as a threesome, a triple-header if you like, and a fantastic outcome for working people across our state.

Denise lived her values. She was a person of integrity, a person of hard work, a person who knew and understood that without Labor governments working people do not get the outcomes they are entitled to. She was all about fairness, disability rights and action towards those rights. She was about looking after her local community. She was honoured to serve in this place. We were honoured to have her elected to the caucus, and it is with a heavy heart that we reflect on her amazing legacy, wish her family well and send our deepest respects to Shea, Hayley, Paul and Stella Mae. Vale, Denise Allen.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:37): Victorians would be rightly confused about the Andrews Labor government’s contradictory stand on the long-held Australian dream of owning your own home. Last week the government announced the property market review, which it says is designed to ensure laws are supporting fair and easy access to the housing market. The government has allocated just two months for the review to be completed. So in just over two months it expects to conduct online public consultations, compile submissions and have a final report provided to the government. For what is such an important review, looking into matters such as underquoting, it is just not a fair dinkum time frame. Yet on the same day the government said homebuyers were finding it difficult to afford properties. What does this government do? It introduces a new tax.

It is an insult to anyone with a dream of owning their own home. At present almost 40 per cent of the cost of new home builds is made up of taxes—and here is the government just adding another one to those. While this new tax only relates to new developments in select cities, you can be sure that if it does not raise enough money this government will expand it to include places like Warrnambool in my electorate. So here we have a government bemoaning how hard it is to get into the market with rising prices, introducing another tax—which will push up prices even further. We know this government is addicted to new taxes, because this is its 41st new tax since being elected—and this coming from a Premier who, prior to the last election, said there would be no new taxes. Well, that is not true.
DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:39): Heading into the 1999 election none of us in our wildest dreams would have thought that the seat of Benalla and Labor’s candidate Denise Allen would be the centre of attention of state politics in the autumn of 2000. Having run in 1999, Denise was a logical and indeed an ideal choice to get straight back out on the hustings when former National Party leader, Deputy Premier and local MP Pat McNamara said goodbye to politics, triggering a by-election.

A born and bred Alexandra girl, Denise spent much of her life in the region and through her campaign efforts put Benalla firmly on the political map and into the stewardship of the Labor Party for the first time in 97 years—and became the first woman to represent the area. Denise entered this place with a determination to see each and every commitment made to her community delivered. I remember well sitting up there in this chamber with Denise. I remember well, in meeting rooms around this building, and I remember too out in the community, how Denise put a fierce spark into every conversation.

Benalla’s needs were also of course always pushed forward by Denise and done in a way that reflected her values of equality, addressing disadvantage and social justice. Denise’s tireless efforts on behalf of her community resulted in much being achieved in her 2½ years in this place representing Benalla, which remains today a tribute to her time as local MP. My deepest sympathies to Denise’s beautiful family—to mum, Bette; and children Shae, Hayley and Paul, who she was so proud of and who made a great contribution to that campaign effort.

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (09:40): A number of CFA volunteers in my electorate have written to me with deep concerns about the reduction in fuel reduction burns in the bush and also the poor management of roadside fire risks over the past summer season. What we have seen is an increase in the amount of bureaucracy that is put in place for CFA brigades—these volunteer brigades—to be able to manage particularly the roadside fire risks. Also they are very concerned that this government has not reached its fuel reduction targets ever.

I quote from Peter Flinn and Simon Armytage—they are both fantastic volunteers who have been members of Dunkeld fire brigade for years:

… the rules have totally changed … In addition to the standard permits, there is a specific “burn plan”—with multiple pages …

They need to have a brigade captain trained to be a qualified burn controller. Even if they have been burning for years, they still need to have that piece of paper to be able to do it. It means we have got greater fire risks in our country areas. I ask the minister to immediately review these guidelines.

SKILLED AND BUSINESS MIGRATION PROGRAM

Ms KEALY: I would also ask the Victorian government to immediately seek an increase in skilled work regional visas, subclass 491. Hospitals right across my electorate are finding it very, very difficult to attract staff, yet Victoria has got one of the lowest rates of skilled visas. This is something that is negotiated between the state and the federal government, but certainly Victoria is well under-represented. I ask the Premier to make representation at a federal level to make sure we increase the number of visas available and make sure our hospitals have got staff.

DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Mr WYNNE (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (09:42): I rise also to make a contribution and celebrate the wonderful life of Denise Allen. The Leader of the House and I are the only two people in this Parliament who actually had the opportunity to serve with Denise, and I want to reflect her comments as well. I mean, this is a woman who truly lived her values. She was a warrior. She was a warrior for social justice, and she lived her principles of social justice and equality not only in this Parliament but also right through the rest of her life. For all of us who did have the
opportunity to work with her, we are better people for having had the opportunity to know Denise and to work with Denise. I remember very well we all went up to Benalla to campaign.

A member: It’s the only time you’ve been out of the city.

Mr WYNNE: If you knew a bit more about my history, you would know my wife and I lived in Benalla for seven years, but that is neither here nor there. In that context she loved the north-east, and for her to have won the seat of Benalla against the former Deputy Premier of this state was truly an extraordinary effort by her. We miss her, we loved her and everything that we do in this Parliament is really about what she believed in—social justice and equality.

VICTORIAN BUILDING AUTHORITY

Mr R SMITH (Warrandyte) (09:43): Today I rise to speak on the Victorian Building Authority’s fee increase. The building industry has had unprecedented pressures placed on it over the past two years through a shortage of materials, government shutdowns, lockdowns and a shortage of trades. Family building businesses and sole traders have been under enormous stress, with many having to source other work or seek work interstate, again adding to our labour and trade shortage.

Having already been confirmed as the highest taxing state in Australia, the Andrews Labor government has introduced over 40 new taxes since coming to office, and once again the government is hiking fees for a struggling sector. The government has proposed an across-the-board rise in registration and annual and renewal fees, and most increases have more than doubled. Building surveyors, demolishers and inspectors will see a 343 per cent increase in registration fees and a 122 per cent increase in annual fees. Master Builders Victoria and the Housing Industry Association have raised concerns about the fairness of the new fee structure; however, the government has shown no interest in supporting our building industry, making it harder for the industry to recover and rebuild.

It is only the Liberals and Nationals who have made the promise not to introduce any new taxes if in government. We are the only parties on this side of the house who will support our building industry and stand up for a fairer fee structure. Labor have clearly demonstrated that their only solution to a mismanaged budget is to continually add to the list of ever-growing taxes and charges.

DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (09:45): Today, like others, I rise to honour the memory of Denise Allen, the member for Benalla from 2000 to 2002, who is the only woman ever to represent that electorate and also the only Labor member. Denise’s efforts at the 1999 election, a campaign she ran on the smell of the smell of an oily rag, achieved a swing of around 8 per cent and put Labor in a fabulous position to take the seat when the former Deputy Premier Pat McNamara resigned his seat, causing a by-election in May 2000. Denise’s work at the general election was recognised, and she was preselected to stand again. Despite a physical disability, being muscular atrophy, she took to the campaign trail with enormous energy and passion.

I count myself as one of the lucky ones to have worked on that campaign, along with the then very young Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers; the member for Altona; the Minister for Crime Prevention; Mr Tarlamis, a member for South Eastern Metropolitan in another place, who apologises for not being at Parliament today due to COVID; and of course the now Premier. The fact that so many of that campaign team followed Denise into Parliament shows how much was learned on that campaign. I had the privilege of driving her the length and breadth of that massive electorate, and we learned so much about each other. I felt she had lived many lives, and although so outgoing she often undersold things that she had achieved before Parliament. I remember driving through Shepparton one day and as we drove past the TAFE she just happened to mention she had been on the equal opportunity committee at that TAFE, and there were just so many things like that.

The ski resorts were part of her passion, and I look forward to sitting down with some of their people tonight and having a drink in her honour.
WARBURTON MOUNTAIN BIKE DESTINATION

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (09:46): The environment effects statement for the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination project ordered by the Minister for Planning will end up costing the Yarra Ranges shire over $5 million. This has seriously depleted the $11 million in funding available to complete this shovel-ready project. This unprecedented request has not been required of any other mountain bike project, not the Spring Gully trail network in Bendigo or the Goldfields Track in Ballarat. In fact it has never been required of any recreation project, including the recently opened $30 million-plus Grampians Peaks Trail that traverses 160 kilometres across the Grampians National Park. Most projects that complete an EES are multibillion-dollar ones. The question must be asked as to why this project has been unfairly targeted.

Forcing the council to complete the extensive process has caused significant delays and seriously threatens the prospects of the project. The project will stimulate the Upper Yarra as it will create jobs and boost the local economy. It is expected to generate 221 000 day visits and inject an economic spend of $48 million into the region, with 229 ongoing jobs and 84 during construction. It will feature up to 177 kilometres of trails across Mount Donna Buang, Little Joe and Tugwell. It is exciting, but it has taken over a decade for the mountain bike destination project to even start delivery and the council is running out of funds. I am confident that when the government made the decision to fund it they did not plan that their share, plus some, would be required to pay the cost of their imposed bureaucracy and not deliver the project.

DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Ms HENNESSY (Altona) (09:48): I too rise to pay my respects to the wonderful Denise Allen. She was indeed a firecracker, and I am so delighted to see the wonderful progeny of that firecracker here in the Parliament today. I had the great honour of being part of the team that worked on her campaign in the by-election for Benalla, and what a proud Labor woman in tiger territory, as it was referred to then, she was. She came from a very proud Labor lineage, with a grandfather that started the first Labor Party branch in Alexandra, followed up by her dad and then of course the wonderful victory in Benalla. They were wonderful, wonderful times, and Denise took great pride in teaching us city slickers how not to order vegetarian food at the Benalla pub, how to walk the talk up at Mount Beauty with the tobacco farmers, not to make too many Ned Kelly jokes in Glenrowan and how to kick back with all the cool kids at the Violet Town pub.

She was an extraordinary human being and, as the member for Yan Yean said, a woman with such an interesting and layered life. She brought a fierce determination to change things to this Parliament, but more importantly after she left this Parliament she continued with her advocacy and her activism. She was a bad-ass on Twitter, she was a woman of fierce compassion, she held people accountable. We loved her, and she will be deeply missed.

CAMPING REGULATION

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (09:49): Surely, could this be right? Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning staff are being taken off fuel reduction burns and emergency firefighting to assist with licensed river frontages for fishing and camping. My mail says up to 32 staff are going to be taken from their normal duties as part of an internal recruitment drive. Last year we had farmers—normally laid back and relaxed farmers—protesting on the steps of this Parliament over the massive overreach in plans to allow this to happen. Common sense won out, and the regulations were watered down. DELWP would still do a review of 27 sites as a trial. Later that number increased to 100. Priority fishing rivers were identified—Goulburn, Ovens, Campaspe, Loddon and Broken.

As published in the Weekly Times this morning, imagine the surprise of farmers on the Mitta Mitta and Murray rivers last month when they started receiving emails and letters saying their properties were now under assessment. These same letters, almost oblivious to geography, still referenced the priority rivers. They were promised prior notice, but when these farmers—normally laid back and
relaxed—called to find out more, they found that the assessments had already been done. One received a call just last week. She was at a country sports tournament and was told staff would be at her farm tomorrow. As I have said before in this place, do not look at what Labor say, look at what they do. This is jackboot diplomacy that is going to spread across the state like the fires these officers should be fighting.

DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) (09:51): I just briefly wanted to acknowledge Denise Allen’s family here today and pay my respects to Denise. Vale, Denise. I do recall working at the Caniambo booth in the 1999 election, and I think it was the first time they had ever seen Labor Party members handing out at the Caniambo booth. I am not sure that we turned that booth towards Labor, but it certainly was a very fun day. I just want to say my condolences to the family.

GREYHOUND ADOPTION PROGRAM

Ms EDWARDS: There has been a lot happening across the Bendigo West electorate over the past week. It was great to host the Minister for Corrections at Tarrengower Prison to celebrate the 500th greyhound, named Boston, to successfully make its way through the Greyhound Adoption Program. This program, which started in 2009, sees prisoners take retiring racing dogs and rehabilitate them for adoption into new homes. It offers benefits for both the greyhounds and the prisoners, who learn new skills to reduce their risk of reoffending, helping them in gaining future employment.

DJA DJA WURRUNG CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

Ms EDWARDS: Last Friday our government officially returned the former Golden Square High School land to the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation so work can commence on the long-awaited Dja Dja Wurrung corporate and community centre. The new centre will be a beautiful community space to celebrate the culture of Bendigo’s traditional owners and will offer opportunities for arts events and learning, and it will also incorporate existing facilities for use by the community. This is a really exciting announcement for our community.

HOFFMAN BRICKWORKS SITE, BRUNSWICK

Dr READ (Brunswick) (09:52): I am sad to announce that last month Heritage Victoria approved the demolition of the engine house, the last original building on the Hoffman Brickworks site, on Dawson Street in Brunswick. This is the end of a decades-long saga that began when a developer bought this historic factory and committed to preserve and restore its historic features in return for the right to build and sell housing over the remainder of the site. Instead buildings were neglected to the point that they can no longer be preserved. In 2020 I asked the Minister for Planning to guarantee the preservation of the heritage buildings, but he did not intervene. Instead we see the end stage of demolition by neglect. In retrospect we should not have trusted a developer back in the 1990s to conserve and restore the industrial heritage. It is easy to be wise with hindsight, but I do hope the government learns from this episode. A constituent suggests we take a look at the revolving fund used by Trust for Nature to buy ecologically valuable sites, restore them and onsell them as an idea for heritage sites. A relatively small sum of money could achieve a lot if used in the same way to buy and then resell heritage buildings with additional protection.

COVID-19

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (09:54): Without a doubt we have got off to a flying start to the school year thanks to the investment in education by the Andrews Labor government. In Williamstown I am so pleased that we have taken every step necessary to ensure our kids are back in the classroom learning safely. We have ramped up vaccinations, with the K-pops program delivering vaccines for vulnerable kids and those living with a disability at our very own
Scienceworks in Spotswood. This site can administer up to 100 doses each weekend and will supplement the network of state-run enchanted forest themed vaccination centres across Victoria.

We have improved ventilation in schools, with Williamstown High, Bayside College, Emmanuel College and Yarraville Special Developmental School receiving air purifiers so far, and we have delivered rapid antigen tests across the electorate. But we are not stopping there. We are also making sure our schools are sun safe, because we know protecting our kids in those early years promotes better sun safety habits. Newport Gardens, Kingsville, Spotswood and Williamstown North primary schools are receiving shaded outdoor learning spaces for students to learn and play outside thanks to our $190 million School Shade Sails Fund. We have taken every measure to protect students and staff in Williamstown at all stages of education.

**HEYFIELD TIMBER FESTIVAL**

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) (09:55): Last Sunday I attended the Heyfield Timber Festival and spoke at the memorial service that brought a very successful event to a close. The memorial service was held at the Victorian Timber Workers Memorial in Lions Park at Heyfield with the names of those fatally injured etched on plaques within stone pillars. Those eligible for these plaques must have worked within Victoria and lost their lives whilst working in the timber industry, either in the bush, a coupe, a mill or cartage. All of those named on plaques died doing what they loved: working in the bush, caring for the bush, supporting their families and producing a product that has underpinned construction in Victoria for well over 100 years.

Aaron Ralph was the emcee at the memorial. His father, Peter, a logging contractor, was killed when Aaron was very young. His mother, Karen Coleman, and grandfather Ray Ralph, also a logging contractor for most of his working life, were there to support Aaron as he led the tribute to his father and fellow timber workers. Karen and Ray were instrumental in getting the memorial project delivered and officially opened by a member for Eastern Victoria, Harriet Shing, in 2015. It is an absolute credit to them and their families and the committee for providing such a fitting sanctuary for the families of those who have lost loved ones in the bush. The festival was an enormous success, an indication of the strong support the timber industry has in regional Victoria. It is a disgrace that the Andrews government continues to rate this industry as political capital to be traded for Greens preferences. Today’s Victorian Labor Party only stand up for workers when it supports their own political ambition. The Premier should hang his head in shame.

**DENISE MARGARET ALLEN**

Ms WARD (Eltham) (09:57): I also extend my condolences to the Allen family and remember Denise’s ferocious tweeting.

**AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS**

Ms WARD: Thank you, Miranda and Marlis, for your decades of work advocating for and supporting refugees in our community. These kind women have demonstrated what it is to give, which is to open your door to strangers, welcome them and make them family. They are important examples of how you live your faith through kindness and love, particularly for those seeking asylum. This year they were given the honour of Nillumbik Citizens of the Year and Volunteers of the Year for their humble, quiet work. I use this opportunity to again call on the Morrison government to release refugees from hotel detention.

Proving age is no barrier, 12-year-old Stephanie Rujak and her 15-year-old brother Hayden were the joint recipients of Nillumbik’s Young Citizen of the Year award. This amazing duo behind Hayden’s Helping Hands, an initiative raising money and goods for people experiencing homelessness and those fleeing family violence, also received the award for Community Group of the Year. In the last seven years Hayden’s Helping Hands has contributed the equivalent of $200 000 in donated clothes, toiletries, food and bedding.
Lorraine Hudson is one of those important people who respond whenever help is needed. For three months last year she prepared delicious meals three days a week, between 80 and 100 meals—anything from sausage rolls to soup to sweet-and-sour chicken—for those doing it tough in Diamond Creek. Whether they be in financial need, physically exhausted or just overwhelmed, people in Diamo knew they were supported. A big shout-out to DC Meats and Local Fine Foods, who donated produce, as well as the many Diamo residents who chipped in to help Lorraine. She is a very worthy recipient of the Nillumbik Senior Citizen of the Year award.

WELCOME TO ELTHAM

Ms WARD: Five years ago my community turned bigotry away with butterflies, colour and compassion. The fabulous Welcome to Eltham group has given those fleeing Syria and Iraq support—(Time expired)

CHARLIE PAYTON

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (09:58): Charlie Payton was a stalwart of the Ballarat community and sadly passed away in January. Charlie was a much-loved, highly respected and passionate advocate for soccer in Ballarat. Not only was he a great player in his youth, but he also shone as a coach, as well as serving on the board of the Ballarat and District Soccer Association, being involved in multiple clubs and hosting a Saturday soccer segment on local radio. It was in the area of accessibility where Charlie truly made his mark, bringing his love of soccer to local schools, especially the Ballarat Specialist School, and fostering a love of the world game across the region. Charlie was a credit to his sport and our community and will be truly missed. I send my deepest condolences to Kathleen, to Kirsty and to all members of his family and his friends.

BALLARAT LYRIC THEATRE

Ms ADDISON: Another wonderful example of the best of our community is the Lyric Theatre and the cast of We Will Rock You, which finally reopened on Thursday after being cancelled last year. By all accounts the show is fantastic. Well done to Lyric president Michael Whitehead, director Stephen Armati, choreographer Katherine Armati, musical director Jane Nice and choral director Kristiana Withers as well as all the cast and crew of this extraordinary production, and thank you for giving 100 free tickets to Ballarat healthcare workers in recognition of their work throughout the pandemic. Every city has a population and a postcode, but it is the people who make the community. Ballarat is a great place to live because of the contribution of so many good people.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (10:00): One of the hardest things to do is to talk about our mental health. That is probably true of all people, but particularly of young people. To admit that you are not doing well, to admit that you are living with a mental illness and that perhaps you cannot see a pathway forward is very, very difficult. Tragically we lose over 350 young people in Australia every year to suicide. In fact it is the biggest killer of Australians between the ages of 15 and 24, and behind each one of those 350 young souls there is a family and there is a tragedy left behind in terms of the community and the pain and the suffering of family and friends but also lost ambition, lost dreams and lost potential.

Last week marked the End Youth Suicide Week, a campaign run by an organisation called Youth Insearch Foundation, so I want to acknowledge them and their campaign. I also want to promote to the community and to my community: please talk about mental health, please talk about how you are feeling. This is the entire rationale of the campaign—that people talk openly about their feelings to their friends and family so that we continue to destigmatise this area. We are doing a power of work through the Minister for Mental Health and the government on implementing the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System recommendations, including destigmatising this issue. So I want to thank all of the organisations that are working with us to achieve that goal, including Youth Insearch Foundation.
DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Ms HALL (Footscray) (10:01): I would like to acknowledge the family of Denise Allen and pay my respects to them and extend my condolences for their loss. What a fierce advocate for the north-east in the Labor Party.

WESTERN SUBURBS PROJECTS

Ms HALL: On the eve of the 2019 election the Morrison Liberal government promised my community a city deal to unlock investment, create jobs and build essential infrastructure. This so-called deal would have provided hundreds of millions of dollars in investment across 13 local government areas, including Brimbank and Maribyrnong, and focused on eight key regions, including Footscray and Sunshine. It was an empty promise, a broken promise, because years later we are still waiting for them to provide the money, and that is a scandal.

The Andrews Labor government is going above and beyond in unlocking the full potential of Melbourne’s west, but we should not have to do this alone. The Morrison government should be for all Australians, not just for New South Wales. There are key projects in my electorate and all over Victoria’s west that are missing out on the federal funding they deserve, and we want to know where the opposition are on this. They could be picking up the phone and speaking to their Liberal colleagues in Canberra and asking why they are not funding essential projects like Footscray’s next performing arts centre or the western intermodal freight terminal, which will take trucks off local roads. The conclusion is clear: we have been ripped off, and the Morrison Liberal government needs to provide Melbourne’s west with — (Time expired)

MOLLIE HOLMAN AWARD

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (10:03): I wish to acknowledge 18 amazing students from across the Box Hill electorate who received the Mollie Holman Award in 2021. Congratulations to Nikki Kao and Tom Mitchell from Blackburn Primary School, Adrian Edwards and Mark Ridout from Blackburn Lake Primary School, Mali Jones and Jonathan Russell from Box Hill North Primary School, Andrea Barraco from Chatham Primary School, Samuel Allsop and Isadora Trembath from Kerrimuir Primary School, Ernest Huang and Chloe McNally from Mont Albert Primary School, Irene Febil and Ryan Li from Old Orchard Primary School, Matilda Parton and Sam Robertson from St Thomas the Apostle Primary School, Robbie Slenders and Talia Langton from Blackburn High School, Rui Ann Lim and Michael Thomson from Koonung Secondary College and Isabella Pignataro from Our Lady of Sion College.

The Mollie Holman Award is an annual award named in recognition of an eminent Australian physiologist who lived for most of her adult life in Mont Albert. The award seeks to recognise students for their efforts in promoting STEAM education within the school environment. Solving problems using science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics through inquiry-based learning has never been more vital, and it is terrific to see our schools encouraging the development of critical thinking amongst our local students. The 2021 award winners are an outstanding group of students, and I wish them luck for the future.

DENISE MARGARET ALLEN

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (10:04): I wish I had known Denise Allen, but you do not need to have known her to see what a lasting impact and legacy she has left in this place, in her community and across Victoria.

BANYAN FIELDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Ms KILKENNY: I wish to congratulate the Banyan Fields Primary School leadership team for 2022. A big congratulations to school leaders Sahaj Pal, ZK Pabelona, Chiara Nasti and Mason Ericksen, and house captains for Healy house, Annalee Fisk and Josh Wright; Gilchrist house, Lila Giffard and Amelia Bacic; Landy house, Nicholas Pritchard and Anthony Mottram; and Davies house,
STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS

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Natasha Morgan-Davey and Sharlysa Wilson. Congratulations to you all. You are going to have an incredible year.

WOMEN IN SPORT

Ms KILKENNY: I am delighted to acknowledge all of my local clubs that went pink over the weekend as a wonderful tribute to acknowledge and celebrate women and girls in all sport. A particular thankyou goes to the Bonbeach Life Saving Club and the Skye Cricket Club.

I would also like to acknowledge the Carrum Bowling Club for sharing with me their commitment to gender equality in local sports, sports clubs and organisations. I thank Trish Church, Andrea Stephens, Doris Amy and all the women for wanting to see and bring about change. They want to make sure that our club committees and leadership roles are filled with women and express the voices and views of women in our local communities.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Report on the 2020–21 Budget Estimates

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (10:06): I refer to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the budget estimates 2020–21 and the contribution from the Treasurer as the Minister for Economic Development on how Victoria is trying to strengthen economic performance with a range of mechanisms. I want today to highlight the brain gain strategy that I am implementing to try and drive these shifts that are of national and state significance. I want to again highlight the campaign and the call to create opportunity zones. These can be delivered in forthcoming state and federal budgets, and they can provide new incentives for economic and social development. I do want to emphasise the value of Melbourne’s north and Broadmeadows within this, because this has been established through the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board. As chair I added ‘4.0’ to the name to emphasise the need to fast-track through deindustrialisation and get to the new industries and jobs—industry 4.0—and how we bring that together. The value has been clearly defined through vaccines and the advanced niche manufacturing that we need to provide independent supply chains and national sovereignty and simultaneously improve place-based disadvantage and inequality. We can do both. That is our challenge, that is our duty, that is our responsibility, and this is what we need to do next.

I do want to emphasise a couple of new initiatives. Within the brain gain strategy we have brought a plan on how we get the value from the multitrillion-dollar industry super funds and put that to work where it has the greatest value to revitalise these communities through new industries and how we coordinate and collaborate on getting that done. I have put that on the agenda, and I am trying to drive that through the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board 4.0. That is the mechanism.

The next thing is we have a wonderful opportunity to add value and to get greater results for economic and social benefit through digital twin technology. Technology is the critical tool to drive change. I have been pursuing this for decades, and we have a wonderful opportunity now through Digital Twin Victoria to get government, industry and the community to collaborate through shared open data, technology and algorithms to enhance real-world results. What digital twin does is it organises and visualises masses of data in one virtual place to create a 3D digital version of the state and of communities. This gives the opportunity for leaders then to have a look at how you get better livability and sustainability and more resilient futures using data and digital innovation and intelligence. This will benefit communities in a great way, so I want to commend Digital Twin Victoria on what they are trying to do there.

By coincidence my speaking about analysing the economic and social mechanisms that can be harnessed for change coincides with the 11th anniversary of my inaugural speech. I will put on the record that here is the challenge: we need to build more resilient communities, take care of inequality, harness technology and deliver greater results for people. So that is what my contribution has been
focusing on—and how you coordinate three tiers of government, business and civil society to make sure that you build a social infrastructure, particularly in communities that have been impoverished in the past.

To look forward, here is how we can harness these results. I want to commend the government. The Big Housing Build will be a generational change opportunity. Here is $5.3 billion that the Victorian government has put on the table. To add value to this I have worked on and co-authored a report with two university professors from the University of Melbourne. They have called it the Broadmeadows model, and it will have value for 321 different suburbs right throughout the state. This is how we stop repeating Einstein’s definition of insanity—that even with the best results and great investments, unfortunately too often when it comes to public housing, abstraction, incuriosity and greed are among the common attributes of mankind that have cruelled these great initiatives worldwide. Here is a better way of doing it. We can coordinate with the best and brightest, bring the best results and make this generational change. This is why Labor matters.

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (10:11): I rise to speak on the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations, a report which was tabled last sitting week. I have now joined this committee, but I was a very late comer and I came after all of the heavy lifting had been done. I want to thank the secretariat for their work but also my colleagues, particularly the member for Tarneit as the chair and the member for Mornington as the deputy chair. Coming in at a late stage, I did catch on and I mostly caught up, but there are a number of important things in this report that I do want to talk about.

Now, first of all is the definition of ‘environmental infrastructure’. Not everybody has a clear understanding of what that is, and we had to as a committee decide what that would be. The definition that we have included in the report is that environmental infrastructure includes parks and open space, forests and bushland—both native vegetation and other forests—recreation reserves and sporting fields, canopy trees and wildlife corridors, and waterways. Now, as has been said by my fellow committee members, we all know that parks and open spaces are critical to our communities, to our streets, to our neighbourhoods and to our towns right across the state. They add to livability, and the importance of green space can never be underestimated. It is good for physical and mental health and wellbeing. For students and for schools having green is important. There are research links to memory, and kids often go outside when they need to chill. And of course it is important for our biodiversity. I think in this instance this was very much a bipartisan report, but what is important as the population grows, as the suburbs spread, is that we keep our parks and our canopy alive. And we really need planning for active and passive recreation.

But I want to focus on a specific element that was brought up in the report about public golf and public golf courses. Public golf in my opinion absolutely needs to be protected, and I speak from having a long and ongoing history with golf and currently as a director of Golf Victoria. Grassroots sport is so important, and golf begins, like everything else, at the grassroots. Public courses, which seem to be up for debate as to whether they are open spaces for everyone to enjoy, are where golfers begin. The vast majority of people start their golf on a public course. They might go out with some friends. A lot of younger people have a go at it themselves—they might have lessons at public courses. But this is where golf begins, and if you take away that public element, the public courses, we do not have a game. I think the push to remove public courses is being made without thinking through the consequences.

As I said, they are where people begin and where we have had some exceptionally talented people begin their golf. Peter Thomson, five-time British Open champion, began at Royal Park Golf Club. Geoff Ogilvy, who won the US Open in 2006—great match play results—played at Cheltenham and Sandringham golf clubs. We have had some on country courses—Stuart Appleby at Cohuna and Jarrod Lyle in Shepparton. This is where these people began their golf, and I am pretty confident that the Premier began his golf at Wangaratta, which is not an elite course.
Now, forcing people off public courses would make the sport elite and not inclusive, and that is the worst thing that can happen. We have 100,000 members of golf clubs at the moment, and there was an 8.9 per cent growth between 2019–20 and 2020–21. Now, that does not include those that take up social golf, and clubs now and courses now are trying to collect that data so we have a real handle on how many people are actually playing golf socially. When I look at what we found in the report and some of the submissions, there are a couple of things that I do want to read. In particular:

The Committee is… mindful that public golf courses provide an affordable and accessible option for members of the public for whom the membership costs and often longer journey times to private golf clubs may be prohibitive.

This is particularly important. We have lost courses at Elsternwick, and at Albert Park who knows, with the government wanting to cut it from 18 holes to 9. It attacks grassroots sport at its most basic level. At Golf Australia they do not have a problem with people enjoying the green space, but they certainly take exception to the notion that golf courses, pristinely presented and maintained with the help of golfers’ money, should give up their space permanently. This should not happen. There are ways to engage with the community without shutting golf course gates. At Northcote, for instance, the local residents have already conceived a community hub which would allow golf, native vegetation and animals to thrive and local community groups to gather. We need to work collectively to protect golf.

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (10:16): I too rise to speak on the inquiry into environmental infrastructure for growing populations. I did speak on this report two weeks ago, and at that time I was focusing on the main elements of the benefits of the environmental infrastructure—the social benefits, the health and wellbeing benefits. I want to focus my contribution today on a particular element of the report which looks at the solutions for the inner suburbs and the middle suburbs. A particular, I suppose, challenge in the inner suburbs and the middle suburbs is that, as the report suggests, we are a growing population. We are a growing population in all parts of Melbourne, but in particular in the inner suburbs and in the middle suburbs where there is a finite amount of land—predominantly all of the land is already built out. There are some areas of existing parkland, but we are seeing lower density housing replaced with high-density housing in many areas.

One of the offsets that is currently available and is currently provided through the Planning and Environment Act 1987 is an open space contribution that is paid for by the developers as part of the development of the land. There was a lot of evidence that we received on the open space development contributions, particularly from local governments in the inner suburbs and the middle-ring suburbs. about how those open space contributions were working and how they were going to be used to make a greater provision of open space for the community. I would say as a general observation that most of the councils that were submitting by and large said that the open space contributions were not sufficient and that they were seeking avenues to make that an easier avenue to get a larger open space contribution. This was in slight conflict to some of the other observations that the committee heard in terms of some councils having quite large pots of contributions that were soaring before they identified where they were going to spend that money. In some councils those contributions had topped $50 million, which is a significant amount of money for a local government to hold on trust for the community.

I think it is really important that some of these ideas get further explored. The committee did acknowledge that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning as part of its Open Space Strategy for Metropolitan Melbourne 2021, which was released in July 2021, included a commitment to:

Review and ensure the effectiveness of current open space contribution guidelines in addressing legacy issues …

I think this is a really good opportunity for the department to look at how the open space contribution is working, and particularly the transparency of the funds once they are collected, because they are collected on behalf of the community and they need to be spent on behalf of the community,
particularly, I would argue, in areas where the contribution has been paid. Sometimes the land is not necessarily available right in that spot, but it is in that general area where those who have made that contribution and those who are going to live without that private open space can have greater access to the public open space. It was a really important element of the committee report to look at the open space contribution. It does make a huge difference to growing communities and is really important for those people who are living in medium-density accommodation. I do hope that the department is able to look at the broad range of impacts of the open space contribution when it does its review.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2021–22 Budget Estimates

Mr D O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:21): I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee estimates inquiry of 2021 into the 2021–22 state budget. It was a pleasure to again be part of that committee and to probe and interrogate ministers and the public service on the budget last year. One thing I want to touch on—and we did touch on through the report and hearings last year—is the introduction of a new windfall gains tax on property rezoning and property developments, and in particular the impact of that on housing affordability and indeed availability across this state. This is currently I think one of the biggest issues certainly in regional Victoria. In my electorate of Gippsland South it is massive. There is a positive, of course. If property prices are going up, people who own property get a benefit from that to some degree, particularly if they are selling. For those who are getting out there is a benefit, and it is a good sign. But it obviously has a flip side as well, and we are seeing that in terms of the availability and the affordability of housing right throughout the region. Indeed stage 4 of a new estate in Sale went on sale at the start of December—41 lots; already sold out, bar three. That is an indication of how much demand there is out there.

That is causing huge issues. It is causing issues for people wanting to trade up, it is causing issues for first home buyers and it is then causing issues for renters who simply cannot get access to rental accommodation or are finding it very, very difficult in terms of affordability—and of course that flows through as well to people who are needing social housing. So it beggars belief that in this context—and even in any context—where obviously one of the jobs the government would like to do is make housing more available and more affordable for people and help people meet the great Australian dream of owning their own home, a government would continue to increase taxes that will ultimately be passed through to homebuyers.

We have had, since November 2014 when the Andrews Labor government came to power, 41 new or increased taxes, and—let me see: one, two, three, six, 12, 15, 18, 23—24 of those taxes are actually on property. We have got a new stamp duty on property transfers between spouses, 2017–18; a new stamp duty on off-the-plan purchases and a new so-called vacant home tax all in the same year; a widening of the vacant residential land tax to uninhabitable properties in 2019–20—et cetera et cetera.

We have got increased land tax for homes with contiguous blocks on separate titles; a series of increases to the fire services property levy; an increased absentee landowner surcharge for foreign property; the windfall gains tax, as I mentioned; and most recently the announcement of a new family home tax—the so-called social and affordable housing levy. The government, bizarrely, is trying to argue whether it is a levy, whether it is a charge or whether it is a tax. It does not matter; at the end of the day Victorians are going to be paying up to $20 000 more for a home in a new development because of this tax. At the same time the government is removing the exemption for social housing from rates and not compensating councils for that. It is estimated that that will cost councils and ratepayers across the state around $141 million.

This is all of course to cover the government’s inept management—the inept management that has seen $24 billion of cost blowouts on major projects around the state. So the government’s actions and decisions on this are just incredible at a time of this difficulty in housing affordability and availability. Yesterday we saw a question to the Assistant Treasurer, and he said of this package of reforms that:
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It is about trying to smooth the pathway to make it easier for developers to get their projects to market. This is about making sure that we can reduce the cost for those businesses …

By adding a 1.75 per cent levy? How does that reduce the cost for those businesses? I will tell you what it does do: those businesses—it is economics 101—will pass on those charges to the end user. That is exactly what is going to happen. It will be an increased cost on Victorians, particularly first home buyers. This is the people in those electorates of many of those on the other side. I cannot believe they have not spoken up about this, that they have not raised their anger in the caucus room, because this is a government that is addicted to taxes. It cannot control its spending, and it is Victorian home buyers and first home buyers in particular that will pay the consequences.

LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (10:26): I am pleased to rise this morning as a committee member of the Legal and Social Issues Committee to speak on the committee’s report into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria. The committee was referred an inquiry into historical forced adoption in May 2019 and tabled its report on 8 September 2021. I would like to thank every person who courageously provided evidence to the committee to help us fully understand the devastating impact of historical forced adoption. I would like to acknowledge those for whom the pain and trauma of the past prevented them from sharing their evidence, and I hope the report is able to begin the process of addressing the trauma and injustice of the past.

In Victoria around 40 000 adoptions were arranged between 1958 and 1984. The evidence received by the committee indicated that many mothers who gave birth around this time were subject to the policy and practice of historical forced adoption. This included sending mothers to maternity homes with harsh conditions; pressuring or coercing mothers into signing consent forms; immediately separating newborn babies and mothers, often against their will; and forcibly restraining mothers when they gave birth. The committee heard of policy and practices that were illegal, unethical, immoral and negligent. On 25 October 2012 the former Victorian Premier, the Honourable Ted Baillieu MP, apologised for these past adoption practices on behalf of the Victorian Parliament, and subsequently the former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, apologised on behalf of the commonwealth on 21 March 2013.

The committee reported on the experience of and ongoing effects on mothers, people who were adopted and others, such as fathers and extended families. The committee discussed the issues of acknowledgment and redress, lifting the statute of limitations, birth certificates, accessing information and family reunion, access to mental health and emotional support services, and concerns about the practice of adoption today. The committee received 114 submissions and held 11 days of public hearings in Melbourne, Kangaroo Flat, Geelong and Wodonga as well as via Zoom. The committee mostly received evidence from mothers, people who were adopted, organisations who were involved in historical forced adoption practices in the past and organisations who provide health and support services. Throughout the inquiry the committee heard again and again how the harm of historical forced adoption had continued and that long-term and meaningful action is overdue.

To work towards reconciliation and healing, the committee made 56 recommendations, some of those include increasing the acknowledgement and recognition of the issue of historical forced adoption; the establishment of a redress scheme for mothers and consideration of a similar scheme for people who are adopted; waiving fees for mothers and adopted people to access their medical and adoption information; an inquiry into the experiences and effect of adoption on people who are adopted; the establishment of a redress scheme for mothers; removing the statute of limitations; implementing integrated birth certificates; ongoing and flexible funding for the Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help to provide post-adoption support and specialised mental health support services; enhancing peer support networks for people affected by historical adoption; and, for current adoptions, mandating the use of an adoption plan, retaining original birth certificates and removing adoption from the permanency hierarchy in Victoria’s child protection legislation.
I would like to acknowledge my fellow committee members for their hard work and also to give thanks to the secretariat—Yuki, Katherine, Richard and Rachel—for their hard work and support throughout this inquiry. I am confident if the recommendations in this report are adopted, they will address the trauma of historical forced adoptions and help the healing process going forward.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Report on the 2020–21 Budget Estimates

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (10:31): I rise to speak on aspects of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2020–21 budget estimates inquiry, and I will be referring also to the 2019–20 budget estimates inquiry as it relates to water issues and in particular to evidence given to that inquiry by the Minister for Water.

In this regard I want to speak first about the Connections Project. I know a lot of people over many years will have heard of the Connections Project, but I think having now reached its conclusion it is important to reflect on what that project delivered and what it means for our communities. It was the largest irrigation project ever undertaken. It was delivered by the Victorian government and jointly funded with the federal government. It has achieved 429 gigalitres of water savings, and 279 gigalitres of that water is part of Victoria’s commitment to the Murray-Darling Basin plan. I will say something more about that in a minute. 1725 kilometres of channels were decommissioned, 9500 meters installed and 7700 landowners’ systems modernised, so it was truly an amazing project, and it was born out of a realisation during the millennium drought of the changing climate, the need for modernisation of irrigation systems and of course issues of food security being recognised. We all remember the millennium drought and around about 2006, 2007 and 2008 that extraordinary time of unbelievable lack of water supply. The lake in Shepparton was completely dry for several years and there were no irrigation water allocations to farms. Dairy farmers were leaving in droves and marriages were breaking down—a truly horrendous time for those of us who lived in those regional towns where the impacts of the drought were felt.

A large community group got together. They called themselves the food bowl group and in negotiations with the Brumby government they were able to put together a plan for this modernisation project. There were over 4000 kilometres of channels winding their way through these irrigation areas, and the modernisation of that capacity reduced the channel length to improve the ability to deliver water to farms. We ended up seeing many channels being lined, some channels being closed and new and modern meters installed on our river systems. What we have been left with now is an extraordinarily modernised system of irrigation. We have lost many farmers along the way, particularly in the dairy industry in northern Victoria, and that is certainly a tragedy and a concern in itself.

But the project has seen delivery of part of our water requirement to the Murray-Darling Basin plan, and with only a couple of years left to go until effectively D-Day on the Murray-Darling Basin plan, when the audit of water delivered by all of the states to achieve that 2750 gigalitres will be undertaken, there is a serious concern in our region about the fact that there are still many projects underway that will not be completed by that date. New South Wales, Victoria and even South Australia are saying, ‘We’ve got projects underway but they cannot be completed by that time’.

Under the current federal Water Act 2007, if the water is not delivered, if it is not available, if it is not part of the plan by that time, the legislation provides for the federal government to go out and buy the water. We saw the impacts of buybacks on our regions—empty shops, farmers leaving. We are terrified in our community that that will happen again, and we see a federal Liberal-National party government with no plan for what will happen in 2024. We have an opposition Labor federally who have not said what is happening, but they have always stood by delivering the plan in full and on time.

We have an independent standing in our region; there are many independents standing across areas in this forthcoming federal election. Our only hope is to have an independent who can negotiate effectively with whoever is in government at the time. When 2024 comes we need to know that the
Productivity Commission will be listened to, that flexibility will be delivered and that there will be more time given to governments and communities to deliver the water that does need to be delivered but to do it in a way that is feasible.

**Business of the house**

**NOTICES OF MOTION**

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe—Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (10:36): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notice of motion, government business, today, and I ask that it remain on the notice paper.

**Bills**

**CONSERVATION, FORESTS AND LANDS AMENDMENT BILL 2022**

**Statement of compatibility**


**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 Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022 (the Bill).

In my opinion, the Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The Bill amends the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 to expand the head of power to make a Code of Practice under section 31. The expanded head of power will enable a Code of Practice to incorporate documents, as amended from time to time, and to confer a discretionary authority on the Minister or the Secretary, and leave any matter or thing to be from time to time, approved, determined, dispensed with or regulated by the Minister or the Secretary.

**Human Rights Issues**

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

The Bill does not engage any human rights protected by the Charter.

*Consideration of reasonable limitations—section 7(2)*

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

**Conclusion**

Accordingly, it is my view that the Bill is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter.

Hon Lily D’Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

**Second reading**

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (10:37): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into Hansard.
Incorporated speech as follows:

Introduction
The management of Victoria’s 7.8 million hectares of public native forests and parks is important to all Victorians. Victoria has approximately 3.1 million hectares of State forests on public land. Forests provide vital ecosystem services, support biodiversity and create a diverse range of jobs and economic, recreational and social opportunities for all Victorians. The connection that Victoria’s Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities have with Country—including Victoria’s forests—is core to their culture and well-being. Effective regulatory frameworks are essential to ensure that we balance the range of values and uses of our forests. This Bill will enable us to provide much clearer direction on what is required to protect our forests—particularly in the wake of natural disasters, such as fires, that change the context for management—to ensure continued use and enjoyment of our forests well into the future.

Implementing the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014
Where timber harvesting operations in State forests are permitted in Victoria, they must be undertaken in accordance with the legislative framework for timber harvesting. Key to this is the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 and the Management Standards and Procedures for timber harvesting operations in Victoria’s State forests 2021. These legislative instruments contain specific rules that protect threatened species and other forest values - including the precautionary principle.

The precautionary principle is a foundation principle in environmental law, adopted by the 1992 Rio Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Victoria’s Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 includes a mandatory action to apply the precautionary principle to timber harvesting activities.

The precautionary principle provides that, if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation. That is, if there are threats of severe or irreversible damage, but the science is not yet settled, the precautionary principle requires us to put in place protective measures to ensure we don’t have regrets in the future.

Most recently, the precautionary principle was triggered by the 2019/20 Victorian bushfires, which dramatically impacted forest ecosystems, threatened the survival of endangered species and limited timber production, particularly in Gippsland and East Gippsland. There remains scientific uncertainty about the ability of species to recover from these impacts and therefore consideration needed to be given to what additional protective actions would be required in timber harvesting operations. The precautionary principle is important because it means our framework for protecting our forests can be adaptable and responsive to changing circumstances or environmental shocks such as major fires. However, its broad application and requirement for expert evaluative judgement means there are opportunities to provide greater certainty for all in ensuring the timber industry is meeting its obligations.

These reforms will enable practical guidance to be given to timber harvesters on the actions they will need to take to meet the requirements of the precautionary principle, particularly in the event of natural disasters that rapidly change the context for management of our forests.

Greater clarity for timber harvesting through the Bill
This Bill will:

a) Enable a Code of Practice to apply, adopt or incorporate any matter contained in any document, standard, rule, specification or method as amended from time to time.

b) Enable a Code to confer a discretionary authority on the Minister or the Secretary, and leave any matter or thing to be from time to time, approved, determined, dispensed with or regulated by the Minister or the Secretary.

This Bill provides these heads of power within the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 (CFL Act), which will apply to all Codes of Practice.

Importantly, these powers will enable a ‘compliance standards’ framework to be established under the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014, to provide alternative mechanisms for satisfying general obligations or duties in the Code that would otherwise be open to interpretation or dispute, such as the precautionary principle.

A Code may already incorporate matters from other documents. The Bill enables the Code to incorporate matters from other documents as they are amended from time to time. It is intended, for example, to enable the Code to incorporate ‘compliance standards’, as published and maintained by the Minister or the Secretary.

The Code may provide that complying with measures from the compliance standards will discharge a particular duty or obligation in the Code such as, for example, to apply the precautionary principle. Being
able to amend the document from time to time enables the standards to be kept up to date with changing circumstances.

Similarly, providing a clearer power, in express and broad terms, to enable a Code to specify matters that will be left to the discretion of the Minister or the Secretary will enable the Code to authorise discretionary approvals as a means of establishing greater regulatory certainty. The Code may provide, for example, that the Secretary may approve certain measures or plans, compliance with which will be sufficient to discharge the duty or obligation in the Code to apply the precautionary principle, in the particular circumstances to which those measures apply.

These reforms are not about changing any obligations that regulated entities have to comply with. Obligations to comply with a Code are fixed by or under other relevant laws, which are not amended by this Bill. These reforms are instead to enable the Code to provide greater regulatory certainty about how generally described obligations or duties in the Code can be satisfied, whether generally or in a particular case. Enabling clear and specific guidance that can respond to events that change the context of forest management is absolutely critical to ensuring certainty for the timber industry while maintaining the high standards of conservation we must continue to provide our native forests.

Maintaining Parliamentary oversight of threatened species protections

The Code currently includes an incorporated document, which is the Management standards and procedures for timber harvesting operations in Victoria’s State Forests 2021 (the MSPs). The MSPs contain many of the Code’s prescriptive environmental protections. I want to be clear that I am not proposing increased flexibility for changes to the MSPs.

It is critical that this reform enables incorporated documents to be amended from time to time to allow the new compliance standard guidance for meeting Code clauses to be responsive. However, I do not consider it suitable for the MSPs to be subject to such flexibility—both the timber industry and community environment groups need to be involved in any changes to these rules.

It is my intent to move the MSPs into the Code so that they are part of the Code itself and no longer an incorporated document. If the proposed amendment is adopted, future changes to the MSPs will be subject to the same process as amendments to the Code itself, which involves a statutory consultation period and is open to parliamentary disallowance.

Conclusion

The Bill will improve timber harvesting regulation in Victoria by enabling the regulator to clarify the intended operation of the Code, providing greater certainty to the Victorian timber industry while maintaining environmental standards. A clear and enforceable regulatory framework is vital for our environment, Victoria’s timber industry and forestry workers as we transition away from native timber harvesting by 2030.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (10:38): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 9 March.

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (TRIAL BY JUDGE ALONE AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2022

Statement of compatibility

Ms HUTCHINS (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (10:39): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022.

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 Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022 (the Bill).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.
Overview
This Bill makes amendments to assist the justice system to manage the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. The Bill will:

- amend the Criminal Procedure Act 2009 and the Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 (CMIA) to allow courts to order judge-alone criminal trials and special hearings on a temporary basis;
- delay the commencement of the de novo reforms under the Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019;
- extend the operation of Part 16 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act);
- extend the operation of section 42JA(2A) of the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958 (EMPA); and
- extend the operation of sections 600S and 600T of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, to the extent that any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and justified.

Human Rights Issues
Judge alone criminal trials
Part 2 of the Bill will temporarily reintroduce provisions allowing trials for Victorian indictable offences to be heard by judge alone in certain circumstances. The reforms will allow courts to order trials by judge alone when a pandemic declaration under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (PHWA) is in effect. These reforms recognise the continued impacts of COVID-19 on the courts conducting jury trials and the resulting delays in the justice system, particularly for people on remand facing indictable charges. The reforms will be temporary and will be repealed 12 months after commencement.

The reforms will allow the Supreme and County Courts to order that a trial be heard by judge alone if it is in the interests of justice to do so and if all the accused persons consent. Jury trials will continue to be available, but these reforms will give parties another option in appropriate cases.

Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to these reforms are:

- the right to life (section 9)
- the right to a fair hearing (section 24), and
- the rights of accused persons in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Right to life (section 9)
This reform promotes the right to life (section 9 of the Charter). The government is obliged to use all means necessary to protect the health and life of all persons in Victoria, including those in closed environments, such as those who work in or use Victoria’s courts. Current public health advice includes maintaining physical distancing to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, which is a potentially fatal virus, and to ensure that health services are not overwhelmed. Allowing trials to proceed without a jury, where appropriate, will reduce the number of people attending court buildings, consistent with this advice.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24) and rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)
The Bill will also engage the right to a fair hearing in section 24 of the Charter and rights in criminal proceedings in section 25 of the Charter. I consider that any limitations on these rights are reasonable and justified in the circumstances and given other procedures and protections are included in the Bill.

First, the Bill does not remove jury trials from the criminal justice system. Rather, it will give the Courts another option to hear indictable matters, while a pandemic declaration is in effect in Victoria, and while the temporary amendments are in place.

Second, the Bill will permit the courts to order a judge alone trial only if it is in the interests of justice to do so and if all the accused persons consent to their trial being heard by judge alone. This will ensure that accused persons retain their ability to have their case heard by jury, should they wish to do so. The interests of justice requirement also ensures that trials only proceed by judge alone in appropriate cases. As with any other trial, the court will have broad discretion to conduct the trial in a manner that is fair to the parties.

The Bill also includes key safeguards, such as rights of appeal against conviction, sentence, or a decision to order, or refuse to order, a judge alone trial, and requiring accused persons to obtain legal advice on whether to consent to a judge alone trial.

For these reasons, I consider that any limitations to the right to a fair hearing and rights in criminal proceedings occasioned by provisions allowing for judge alone trials are reasonable and justified.
Judge alone special hearings under the CMIA

The Bill will make changes to the CMIA to allow a special hearing to be heard by a judge alone if it is in the interests of justice to do so. These amendments are necessary to ensure CMIA proceedings can be conducted with greater flexibility throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and in a timely way. A special hearing is a modified form of trial, and it is important to avoid unreasonable delay to these hearings for the same reasons as trials. Further, accused persons who are dealt with under the CMIA will be either severely mentally impaired or mentally ill and are therefore particularly vulnerable.

As with amendments to allow judge alone criminal trials, these amendments engage the right to a fair hearing in section 24 of the Charter and rights in criminal proceedings in section 25 of the Charter.

The Bill will allow a judge alone special hearing only if the court considers that it is in the interests of justice to do so. The Bill will also allow the court to consider the views of both the prosecution and the accused when the court is determining whether to order that a special hearing be conducted by judge alone. In alignment with the judge alone trial model, these changes will be time limited, and will be repealed 12 months after they commence. In addition, an order for a judge alone special hearing may only be made when a pandemic declaration is in force. This is appropriate given these reforms are aimed at responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its continuing effect on the court system.

In addition, the Bill will also make amendments to address concerns raised by stakeholders that the three-month timeframe in section 12(5) of the CMIA is presenting considerable challenges as the pandemic continues.

This reform promotes the right to life under section 9 of the Charter, by reducing the risk that those who work in and attend Victoria’s courts will contract the potentially fatal COVID-19 virus. The amendments to the three-month timeframe will enable the judiciary to consider the individual facts of each case thoroughly, and fully consider the interests of justice in deciding whether a jury or judge alone special hearing would be the most appropriate in the circumstances of the case. This will promote the right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter.

For these reasons, I consider that any limitations on these rights are reasonable and justified in the circumstances given the procedures and protections included in the Bill.

Extension of COVID-19 temporary measures in the OHS Act

Part 3 of the Bill extends Part 16 of the OHS Act, introduced through the COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) and Other Acts Amendment Act 2020 and further extended in the Justice Legislation Amendment (System Enhancements and Other Matters) Act 2021. Part 16 was also further extended and amended by the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Act 2021.

These reforms engage the right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26).

Part 16 explicitly states that a breach of a pandemic order or public health direction relating to the COVID-19 Pandemic under the PHWA is presumed to be an immediate risk to health and safety under that Act, and is currently due to expire on 26 April 2022.

To ensure that WorkSafe inspectors can continue taking decisive enforcement action under the OHS Act in response to non-compliance with COVID-19 directions under the PHWA, the Bill will extend Part 16 of the OHS Act to apply until 26 October 2022.

This will mean that a breach of a pandemic order or public health direction will continue to be taken to be an immediate risk to the health or safety of a person for the purposes of s 112 (Prohibition Notices) and s 120 (Directions) of the OHS Act. Section 112 allows an inspector to issue a person who has control over an activity in a workplace with a notice prohibiting the carrying on of that activity, if it involves an ‘immediate risk to the health or safety of a person’. Section 120 allows an inspector to give a direction to a person at a workplace if necessary, because of an ‘immediate risk to the health or safety of a person’.

The extension of these provisions means that WorkSafe inspectors can continue to take expedited enforcement action to prevent, reduce or mitigate workplace exposure to COVID-19, on the basis that the direction under the PHWA (which can only be made where the officer making the direction has determined under the PHWA that there is a risk to public health) is a sufficient basis for making a direction or issuing a notice under these provisions. This allows for WorkSafe inspectors to rely on the assessment made under the PHWA without having to undertake that consideration again (which may be a consideration they are less qualified to undertake than the person issuing the direction under the PHWA, given it will be based on public health considerations).

The amendment is necessary to ensure that WorkSafe Inspectors are able to take action to support compliance with the PHWA directions in workplaces, under the OHS Act (because the OHS Act is tailored to the legal obligations arising in that environment) rather than utilising the offence provisions aimed at individuals in ss 193 and 203 of the PHWA.
Given that ss 112 and 120 create indictable offences for failures within workplaces in relation to conduct that is also likely to be a breach of ss 193 or 203 of the PHWA, it is possible that a person could be charged with two different offences relating to the same wrongful act. This does not mean that a person will be tried or punished more than once for the same offence contrary to s 26 of the Charter.

The rule against double jeopardy does not prevent more than one penal consequence flowing from the same act, where that act constitutes more than one offence. The double jeopardy principle generally applies where a person is charged with exactly the same offence for which they have been previously acquitted or convicted, or an offence that is substantially and practically the same (Carroll v The Queen (2002) 213 CLR 635). A court may choose to stay a proceeding as an abuse of process if it involves re-litigation of a previously decided factual issue and in particular will not allow the prosecution to question or call into question a previous acquittal. In addition, the prosecution is generally required to include all related offences on the one indictment and the use of subsequent indictments for related offences may be found to be vexatious (Carroll v R (2002) 213 CLR 635).

A court is likely to expect all related charges under the OHS Act and the PHWA to be included on the one indictment and the common law prohibition on double jeopardy will continue to operate to protect people from a breach of s 26 of the Charter. I therefore conclude that these amendments do not limit s 26 of the Charter and are not likely to give rise to such limits in the courts.

Extension of COVID-19 temporary measures in the EMPA

Part 3 of the Bill will extend the operation of section 24JA(2A) of the EMPA, so that adult accused who are in custody will continue to be required to attend a summary contested hearing or a committal hearing by AVL by default. This extension is necessary to protect the safety of prisoners, staff and visitors in a prison environment where COVID-19 can quickly spread.

Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to these reforms in this Bill are:

- the right to a fair hearing (section 24), and
- the rights of accused persons in criminal proceedings (section 25).

Rights to a fair hearing and equality before the law (section 24)

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

The Bill upholds this right by ensuring that a court may order physical attendance for these hearings if it is in the interests of justice to do so. A fair hearing will always be in the interests of justice. Further, in making this assessment, the court must consider the ability of an accused to comprehend proceedings and to communicate with, and give instructions or express wishes to, their legal representative. In addition to upholding the right to a fair hearing, this safeguard ensures that the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination in section 8(3) of the Charter is not limited, by supporting vulnerable accused persons who may have difficulty following the proceedings by AVL, including those with disabilities.

In addition, the legislation contains minimum requirements for an AVL or audio link to ensure that the transmission quality is fit for purpose. These minimum requirements mean that if a hearing proceeds by AVL or audio link, an accused person can fully participate in the proceedings, be heard by the court and give necessary instructions to their legal representative.

For these reasons, I consider that the reform is compatible with the rights in section 24 of the Charter.

Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Section 25(2)(d) of the Charter provides that an accused has the right to be ‘tried in person’ and to defend himself or herself personally or through legal assistance. The purpose of this provision is to ensure an accused is not tried in their absence and has the right to fully participate in their trial and defence.

An accused still participates in their hearing ‘in person’ when they attend by AVL. The accused is not being tried in absentia. It will remain possible for courts to order physical attendance for such hearings when the interests of justice require it. The court will be able to consider the accused’s capacity to participate in the trial via AVL, as well as other relevant matters, when applying the interests of justice test.

For these reasons, I consider that the reform is compatible with the right in section 25 of the Charter.

Hon. Natalie Hutchins, MP
Minister for Crime Prevention
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Youth Justice
Minister for Victim Support
Second reading

Ms HUTCHINS (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (10:39): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

In April 2020, the Government introduced reforms aimed at ensuring the justice system could respond effectively to the challenges that COVID-19 posed, including the introduction of judge alone trials and special hearings. These reforms were time-limited and operated effectively until April 2021.

We all hoped that specific COVID-19 related provisions would no longer be required in 2022. However, the continued impacts of COVID-19, including the significantly increased prevalence of COVID-19 in the Victorian community compared with earlier stages of the pandemic, have changed the public health context. Even with high levels of vaccination and continuing public health measures, it is very likely that disruptions to jury trials and hearings caused by COVID-19 will continue for some time.

To provide the courts with an additional tool to respond to these potential disruptions and allow more criminal cases to proceed, the Bill will reintroduce these judge alone provisions on a temporary basis. The Bill will also make other reforms to ensure the justice system can manage the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, including extending temporary provisions due to expire in April 2022.

I now turn to specific aspects of the Bill.

Judge-alone criminal trials

Currently, criminal trials in Victoria must be heard by a jury, reflecting the longstanding and fundamental role of juries in the criminal justice system.

Jury trials are running in both the Supreme Court and the County Court, and the courts are implementing measures to ensure these trials run as safely as possible, for example by establishing testing facilities for jurors and other trial participants (including legal practitioners) in Melbourne, the use of rapid antigen tests on circuit and re-purposing trial and jury rooms to allow for appropriate social distancing. The courts are also conducting most non-jury work remotely, to reduce the number of users physically present at court.

Despite these efforts, the courts continue to face significant trial backlog and disruptions, which continue to be exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many jury trials have been adjourned due to COVID-19 since the pandemic started, and juries have been discharged due to COVID-19. Concerns about COVID-19 also appear to be affecting the available pool of jurors, with more potential jurors asking to be excused.

Delays in criminal proceedings can adversely impact complainants and victims, due to uncertainty about when matters will be heard, and lack of closure. Delays can also significantly impact accused persons, particularly those being held on remand while awaiting trial.

Accordingly, with the support of key stakeholders including the courts, this Bill will reintroduce the temporary judge alone trial model, which operated between April 2020 and April 2021 (the 2020 model). This scheme operated effectively and is already known to the courts and legal profession.

Like the 2020 model, these reforms will be time limited, and will be repealed 12 months after they commence. The key substantive difference from the 2020 model will be to provide that an order for a judge alone trial may only be made when a pandemic declaration under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 is in force. This reflects the new pandemic management legislative framework and is appropriate given these reforms are aimed at responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its continuing effect on the court system.

In addition, the Bill will allow applications for judge alone trials that have been lodged (but not yet considered by the court) while a pandemic declaration is in force or before the sunset date to continue and, if an order is made, will allow these trials to proceed by judge alone. The 2020 reforms required the order for trial by judge alone to be made before the sunset date. This change will give the courts appropriate flexibility in the event that numerous applications are filed close to the expiry date of a pandemic declaration or the sunset date.

These reforms will enable the Supreme and County Courts to order an accused person to be tried by a judge alone in certain circumstances. These trials will be available for any Victorian indictable offence, but only if the court considers it in the interests of justice to hear the trial by judge alone and the accused person consents and has obtained legal advice on whether to give consent. While the prosecution’s consent will not be
required, the court must consider any prosecution submissions before deciding whether to order that a matter be heard by a judge alone.

Allowing the courts to order trials by judge alone will give the courts and parties an alternative to jury trials in appropriate cases and allow more criminal trials to run. This will minimise delays in the court system and benefit parties.

As with the 2020 model, parties will be able to appeal verdicts made by a judge sitting alone in the same way as a jury verdict. Parties will also be able to appeal a decision of a court to order, or not order, a trial by judge alone.

In 2020, the government committed to significant consultation with stakeholders and the broader community before considering any permanent judge alone trial scheme. The government stands by that commitment. These are temporary reforms that are being reintroduced only to assist the justice system to safely continue to determine more criminal trials while COVID-19 continues to affect jury trials. The new requirement for a pandemic declaration is an additional safeguard and reinforces the temporary nature of these reforms.

The government is hopeful that these provisions will no longer be required as the pandemic progresses, and we learn to live with COVID-19. In the interim, however, they will ensure the continued effective and efficient functioning of the justice system and assist its recovery from COVID-19, while protecting the health and safety of Victorians, including jurors, court users and court staff.

**Judge alone special hearings under the Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 (CMIA)**

The Bill will amend the CMIA to allow proceedings to be conducted with greater flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic, by allowing a special hearing under the CMIA to be heard by a judge alone if it is in the interests of justice to do so. In determining whether to make an order that a special hearing be heard by judge alone, the Bill will require the court to take into account the views of the accused as well as the prosecution.

These amendments are necessary to ensure that certain CMIA proceedings can continue throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in a timely way. Avoiding unreasonable delay is important in CMIA matters, as proceedings generally involve vulnerable accused persons with severe mental impairments or mental illness. Allowing judge alone special hearings will avoid further disruptions and backlogs in the court system and will reduce the risk that those who work in and attend Victoria’s courts will contract the potentially fatal COVID-19 virus.

In addition, the Bill will make amendments to address concerns raised by key stakeholders that the three-month timeframe for special hearings is presenting considerable challenges as the pandemic continues. The CMIA provides that if the accused is found not fit to stand trial and the judge determines that the accused is not likely to become fit within the next 12 months, the court must proceed to hold a special hearing within three months. The Bill will allow for one extension to the three-month period to be granted, if it is in the interests of justice. The court may extend the time for a period that is reasonable, taking into account all the circumstances of the case and submissions from the prosecution and defence. This will ensure the extension will only be for the minimum period necessary to allow for the matter to be prepared, considering the individual circumstances of the case.

In alignment with the judge alone trial model, these changes will be time limited, and will be repealed 12 months after they commence. In addition, the variations noted above in relation to the judge alone trial model will apply to these reforms.

**Delaying the commencement of de novo appeals reforms**

In 2019, Parliament passed laws to modernise Victoria’s summary criminal appeal system. The *Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019* will abolish de novo appeals of criminal cases to the County Court and replace them with new processes that will enhance efficiency and transparency and reduce the burden on witnesses and victims.

These are important objectives, but they can only be achieved if courts and the legal profession have sufficient time to prepare for this significant change in practice. The commencement date for these reforms was postponed to 1 January 2023 by the *Justice Legislation Amendment (System Enhancements and Other Matters) Act 2021* (System Enhancements Act) to allow courts and the legal profession more to prepare, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the court system and the significant time and resources required to implement the reforms make it necessary to further delay the commencement of the de novo appeal reforms until July 2025. This delay will ensure that efforts can remain focused on managing the impacts of COVID-19 and addressing the backlog of cases in the court system.

**Extension of COVID-19 temporary measures**

The Bill will extend Part 16 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act)*, which is a temporary Part introduced by the *COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) and Other Acts Amendment Act 2020* and
extended by the System Enhancements Act and the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Act 2021.

The extension of this Part for a further six months will maintain the ability of WorkSafe inspectors to take enforcement action in relation to the occupational health and safety risks posed by COVID-19. Importantly, the extension will also ensure that employers and other duty holders under the OHS Act are providing a safe place of work and continuing to mitigate COVID-19 exposure risks in the workplace.

The Bill also extends section 42JA(2A) of the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958, which requires adult accused in custody to attend a summary contested hearing or a committal hearing by AVL by default. This temporary provision was introduced by the System Enhancements Act to address risks posed to the accused and other court users and staff by COVID-19 and is currently due to lapse on 26 April 2022.

Due to the risks presented by the ongoing pandemic, the Bill will extend the operation of this provision for a further 12 months. This will support Corrections Victoria to manage infection risk in custodial settings and mean fewer accused are required to undertake quarantine processes after attending these court hearings. However, as is appropriate, the Magistrates’ Court will retain the ability to order an accused to physically attend court when the interests of justice require it.

The Bill also extends Part 8.5A, sections 600S and 600T of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 for a further 12 months. These powers allow for the use of AVL or audio-link to satisfy young people’s attendance and reporting requirements under the Act. This was introduced as part of the COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020 and further extended for 12 months by the Justice Legislation (System Enhancement and Other Matters) Act 2021 and is currently due to also lapse on 26 April 2022.

Due to the current number of COVID-19 transmissions in the community, the requirement to attend a youth justice unit or report may not be feasible in some locations where staff or young people are isolating due to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 transmissions or cases. These extensions will ensure that Youth Justice can flexibly and appropriately manage the safety and wellbeing of young people under youth justice community supervision by allowing young people a remote means to safely suffice the requirements of their community order.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (10:39): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ms HUTCHINS (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (10:39): I move:

That debate be adjourned for 13 days.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (10:59): We object to debate being adjourned for 13 days. It is customary in this house that debate be adjourned until 14 days. This is not something that we were given any notice about. I think if the government have not got their business program for the coming week sorted, then that is their problem. We would expect that this debate be adjourned for 14 days. We have had many instances in the past where this has not been accepted. We have had instances where we have agreed to debate being continued quickly, getting it through the next day perhaps, when the matters have been of absolute importance and it has been agreed to previously by all parties. What has happened here is that nobody has been given any notice of this. We need time. Our shadow ministers need time to go out to the stakeholders in this area and get their views. It is tricky enough doing that within a two-week period, let alone when that is cut to 13 days. It means one less day for people to get organised and for stakeholders to understand the bill. The bill is only just now being made available publicly, so these stakeholders will have to get themselves organised and talk to other people that they deal with, and they have often quite a number of people that they need to deal with. They need to convene meetings and they need to have a number of people around the meetings.

The more detailed the bill is the more time we would actually need to be able to debate this. And when you have got a bill on something such as justice, which is going to be of great importance to a lot of people, I do not think it is acceptable in this place given the customs that we have had and the reasons for those customs. Those customs are not just made up, those customs are there for a reason—because
it is reasonable for all parties, including the opposition and the shadow ministers, to do the work that they need to do to digest the bill, understand its intent fully and look for all the gremlins which often exist and are often hidden, and it take some time to uncover those. Then that is equally so for any of the stakeholders that are involved in these instances.

We are looking at a bill for a trial by judge alone and perhaps other matters, and when you have got something that says ‘other matters’ that can be a whole host of other matters. That will not just be one thing. That will be a whole host of different matters, and there will be different stakeholders that will have different opinions on each of these matters. So I think that the minister in calling for 13 days has been particularly unfair and has shown no regard for this. I am confident that the other members of the opposition will stand behind me as we oppose this adjournment for 13 days and not 14 days.

We had the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change just moments before with the Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022. She adjourned that for two weeks—14 days. Then the next minister came in and pulled a swiftie. She did not talk to anyone about it and did not provide any reasons why this should be 13 days, not 14 days. Why she has chosen to break custom in this house to do so is still a mystery to us, and I think that that is absolutely unacceptable. If the minister for environment can do that—and I must say on that bill the minister for the environment’s office yesterday contacted me about a briefing, so they have been very much on the front foot. It had not even been second read then, and they had contacted me and done the right thing to fill us in, to make sure we knew what was going on and that we had every opportunity to digest, circulate and contact everybody who needs to know about this bill. Frankly, a lot of people who are impacted by these bills do not actually even realise, and it takes the work of the opposition to ferret out exactly who it is that does need to be contacted and whose opinions we need to find, because that is how we then come up with the position we land on—whether we will support, not oppose, outright oppose, oppose certain clauses or seek amendments. That is the time that we need. That extra day does in fact make a difference. It makes a difference to the stakeholders and it makes a difference to us. I am quite horrified that after the previous minister did two weeks this one cannot.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:45): We have heard what sounds like, I guess, a suggestion that the opposition might need to get organised, because we are certainly organised. We have put it out there that we want 13 days. We have heard about digesting, we have heard about circulating. I might just ring the candidate—soon to be member I think—for Hastings, Paul Mercurio, and talk about menus and circulating and digesting things. Have you ever heard of Teams? Ever heard of Zoom? Ever heard of working on a Sunday? These are all things people on this side of the house do. It is easy to be rambunctious about this. We always expect people on the other side of the house to be contrarian about it, but I would say 13 for some people is not unlucky. You make your luck with how hard you work, and I am sure 13 days is enough to speak to people on your side of politics or any stakeholders in your community, to weather this and to air this out. Certainly from our point of view we hear that there is not enough time, it is too much time. We cannot really find a middle ground sometimes with the opposition. It is just contrarianism. We see this in the media every day with the Leader of the Opposition questioning health orders and questioning why we would do something. It is the same here in this chamber right now, and the relevance I am getting to is exactly this—

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a procedural motion. It is not an opportunity to attack the opposition or promote the opportunities of candidates of a political party. I ask you to bring the member back to the limited scope of this motion allows, which is particularly around reducing the normal time for a debate to be adjourned to 13 days rather than the standard 14-day period.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Lowan. I ask the member for Frankston to return to the procedural debate.

Mr EDBROOKE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I am pretty sure we can all agree that there is a very limited scope to a point of order too, but we will not go down that path now. What I am getting to is this is not all that controversial—it is not—but it is the contrarian nature of those in opposition
who would like to make it an issue. Certainly I support the procedural motion that our members have been speaking on, and I think that everyone in this house who is reasonable should also do that.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (10:47): I rise to speak on this procedural motion that the debate be adjourned for only 13 days. It is disappointing that the member for Frankston, in his very brief contribution, managed to demonstrate overwhelmingly that he does not know the forms of the house. He has been here for almost two terms. He clearly needs a briefing from the clerks on why we have these traditions and why there are democratic traditions built into why we have 14 days, not 13 days. The clerks are always available, I am sure, to explain to him how the forms of the house work, but he clearly has not availed himself of those opportunities. He took his time in this place to demonstrate his ignorance of why we go for 14 days and why it is just continually being undermined by—

Mr Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would bring the opposition speaker back to the limited scope of this debate, which is about a procedural motion, not about me as a member. I understand that the member has had issues with fixating on members in this house before. I do not wish to be in that position, but this scope is limited.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Frankston. I do ask the member for Ripon to come back to the procedural debate.

Ms STALEY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I have had advice from the shadow minister that the shadow minister was not asked for a reduction in the traditional time and has clearly not agreed to a reduction in the traditional time of two weeks. We on this side of the house have consistently stood up for the democratic norm that we have a two-week laying on the table of bills so that not only can we consult with the stakeholders that need to be consulted with but those stakeholders and others can bring forward to us and to other members in this place— I see the member for Shepparton is here— their views on bills. Over and over we have seen this government make mistakes in its legislation that it has then had to bring in amendments for. In fact I am advised that the next bill we will be debating this morning, the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, has to have a house amendment made here because they got the legislation wrong. Now, that is exactly the kind of reason why we require a 14-day adjournment of bills. We have been entirely consistent on this point of principle. This is not new. This is us standing up for the traditions of this place, the democratic traditions, that require proper consultation periods. Now, the government has tried to slide this one in—

Mr Foley interjected.

Ms STALEY: I hear the bellowing from the Minister for Health across the table. I understand it is disorderly to interject and it is disorderly for me to take up an interjection. However, I note that he seems to have no conception of why you might have a standing principle of 14 days and why that might matter. I would have thought he would know better. But clearly the members of the government at every turn just think they can slide in these little changes. Then suddenly it is not 14 days that is the average, it is no longer that 14 days is the time that the bill would sit; it suddenly becomes, ‘Oh, it’s normal practice that it’s only 13’. Then it might be 12, and then suddenly we have bills that are not urgent brought in as urgent bills; they have done that as well. In fact I am waiting, could I say, for the latest taxation bill to land upon us. I would have thought that might have landed today, but I suspect they are trying to fix the errors in that one too.

This bill, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022, I am sure, as the minister at the table has said, is an important bill and one that therefore needs proper consideration by this house— by every member of this house—and by the community, and the government is riding roughshod over that. They can say, ‘Oh, it’s only one day’, but the point is we have 14 days as the standard for a reason. It is a norm of our democracy for a reason. You do not just mess around with it because you are not organised and you need something to debate the next week in the parliamentary term. If the Minister for Crime Prevention is not organised enough to get her legislation into the Parliament in time for when she wants to debate it, that is not on us. That is on her
and the government and the way they manage their legislation. So we oppose this motion, and we will vote against it.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (10:52): I very much with pleasure rise this morning to speak to this procedural motion. This government has a very, very busy legislative agenda. We have a lot of reform that we want to get through, and therefore we want to give an adequate amount of time of 13 days for the opposition to be able to consult. We are ready to move of course on this reform. This is important reform. This is important for the functioning of our justice system.

The standing orders provide us the opportunity to have these bills lay on the table for as long as we see fit. The government sees that it is appropriate that the opposition be provided 13 days for them to be able to consult the sector and to be able to bring those views back to the table in 13 days time, when we get to debate this. The government has a busy legislative agenda. We want to get through these justice bills as quickly as we can to ensure that we have a strong, functioning justice system in this state. These are important amendments, and that is why it is appropriate that we provide the opposition with 13 days to be able to consult so that we can get on with delivering this important reform to the people of Victoria, who elected the Andrews Labor government to get on with it—and that is what we are doing.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (10:54): I speak against this motion that the bill be adjourned for 13 days rather than the standard practice of the house that it be a minimum two-week period for a bill to be adjourned off. As has been eloquently outlined by the member for Ripon and the member for Eildon before me, we have democratic processes and forms of the house that are in place to ensure that the community has got the opportunity to revise legislation that will be put before the house to see if there will be any unwanted or unintended consequences of the legislation as it is put. So this is not necessarily as it has been prosecuted by the government, saying, ‘We need to do more. You should be able to do it in the 13-day period’. This is actually truncating the opportunity for the Victorian people to properly review and revise legislation which will impose changes on their lives on a day-to-day basis.

We know that there will be and there have been many, many changes made to bills, sometimes right at the point that they are to be debated. I refer to the next bill which is set to be debated this morning, the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, which has had a problem found with it. There will be a house amendment circulated today, and this is something that was picked up over that two-week consultation period where we adjourn off a bill and have the opportunity to talk to our stakeholders to look at the implications of the bill in practice and, as I said, note any changes that may need to happen. Now, by reducing this back to 13 days it is actually reducing the opportunity for everybody to look over this bill—for everybody to pick up any errors that might be in there, for everybody to pick up any unintended consequences and give time then for the government to correct them or to provide further clarification about them or whatever is most suitable for that time. This is something that happens on a regular basis. It is not a one-off; it is something we see from this government time and time again.

I would like to pick up on a comment made by the member for Frankston that somehow we are being contrarian by daring to go against the government. Now, we are not the contrarian people here. It is actually contrarian to ask for 13 days rather than the form of the house, being the two-week period. So if there are allegations of anybody being contrarian, perhaps the member for Frankston can review his own government’s actions of seeking to further truncate the opportunity for the Victorian people to review bills before they come to the house. This is a very, very important thing.

Mr Edbrooke: I think you need to look at the meaning of being contrarian.

Ms KEALY: I am being informed through interjections—I know I should not be picking up those interjections, but I will—that somehow there is an issue around being contrarian and that I have not interpreted that correctly. Now, it would be against the norm, on my interpretation of that, and I think that asking for 13 days rather than two weeks is against the norm, so perhaps the government should look at their own process and get a bit more organised.
BILLS

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We saw a bill, the Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022, which was raised and debated in this house just prior to this one, and it was adjourned off for the full two-week period. Now, this is something on which we have seen good action by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. They actually organised a bill briefing yesterday for that. There has been great organisation on the part of the government. So if anybody’s organisational skills should be taken into question today, they should be the organisational skills of the Attorney-General, who is responsible for this bill. They should have communicated that there might be some delays about that to not just the opposition but also the independents, who were completely blindsided by this motion this morning that this bill would be adjourned off for just 13 days rather than the standard two-week period. We all have an opportunity to do that. That is not being contrarian, that is just seeking to make sure we uphold the democratic values and the democratic forms of the house.

It is something that we can always get a briefing from the clerks about. They are very informed and they are very, very handy when it comes to any questions you may have about procedures of the house, and so I would invite all members of the government to have a briefing with the clerks and find out why these norms of the house, including having a two-week period to adjourn off a bill, are in place—why it is so important for Victorian democracy, why it is so important for members of Parliament, and that includes members of the government benches as well. You also need an opportunity to be able to scrutinise the bill and make your own judgements on that. It may mean that you do not read your little cheat sheet of what you have to say the next time there is an opportunity to debate the bill. You might have to be able to talk to your own community members, to your own businesses and organisations that are impacted by a bill. So it is not just truncating our opportunity to talk to our stakeholders, it is actually seeking to truncate your own opportunity to speak to people in your own electorate. Now, I would have thought that is something you would all like to do given there is an election coming later this year, but it seems like you are hiding a little bit from what is happening in the government, because the government is on the nose a bit at the moment. I would like to think that you would actually dare to stand up against the Premier, that you would dare to stand up against this ridiculous motion to truncate the adjournment to 13 days rather than two weeks and that you would stand up for your constituents and oppose this motion yourselves.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (10:59): (By leave) I rise to speak against this motion too. While there is a good argument that one day might seem trivial, there really is an important issue of principle here, and it has been reflected in so many ways in this Parliament over many, many years where we have seen a slow derogation of the capacity for this side of the house to scrutinise government. Just on the issue of 13 and 14 days alone, I think it is an important issue, because this bill is actually a really important bill. It is a piece of justice legislation that goes to the issue of trial by jury, trial by judge alone in a time of pandemic. We saw something rushed through the house during the course of last year to enable this to occur on some sort of temporary basis. There was no time for scrutiny and no time for debate about that in this house. It was effectively some sort of amendment, I think, that no-one had the opportunity to consider in any detail. This is a really important issue. Trial by jury is a fundamental human right that exists in our society, and trial by judge alone in criminal matters in particular is something that has been embedded in our justice system forever. It is really so important that we have the time to look at this.

For the issue of one day to become an argument here—again, it might seem minor, but let us not forget that late last year the government came into this house with the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Bill 2021 around the pandemic legislation. It introduced it here on a Tuesday morning—first read—and we had to vote on it on Thursday afternoon of the same week. There was no room for consultation. There was no room to go back to our communities, to go to the integrity bodies, and let me tell you, they were very interested. They said that they had not been consulted in the way that they were supposed to have been consulted with. So what happened then was a very torrid time in so many ways because of the way that bill was dealt with, whereby we had demonstrations on the steps and we had crossbenchers in the upper house being vilified at every level, but ultimately the bill was made a better bill and ultimately it came back here. In some ways you might
say that that was democracy at work, and in a sense it was—two houses both working on it. But if we do not try and preserve some of the norms of this Parliament, then we are going to be in trouble.

Let me tell you, people are talking about it. People are talking about the motion that I put before this house every Tuesday—that we should debate whether we should have a non-government business program. That is now being talked about more broadly than in this place. You all might think that I am being trivial raising that, but that is an important feature of any parliamentary democracy, any house of Parliament. Every single other lower house in the Westminster system has a non-government business program. The Victorian Parliament is the only one that does not. When do we get to do consideration in detail anymore? Hardly ever. The last time I remember a significant one was on the assisted dying legislation, and it was an outstanding opportunity for the minister to talk about and be scrutinised on an important bill. We have a situation now where most of the ministers are here, but up in the upper house, the other place, that is where the consideration in detail takes place, not with the minister who is responsible for the bill fronting those questions, because they are down here. This should be happening here; it should be happening in this house.

So these are some of the fundamental issues around how Parliament operates that we need to start thinking about. We need to preserve them, and they need to be respected. It might only say in the standing orders ‘a reasonable time’, but 14 days has been the norm. We should stick to the norms. As someone else has mentioned, if we are approached on this side of the house and good reasons are put for something, they are considered and very often agreed to. But to come in here and think you are just going to push that through is not good enough. It is just a reflection of a change of attitude that has developed over a very long period in this place that is denigrating the standards and the actual operation of this place, which is meant to operate in a way that gives all members of this house the opportunity to know and understand what is going on, to go back to their communities and to be able to debate effectively.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 48
Addison, Ms 
Allan, Ms 
Andrews, Mr 
Blandthorn, Ms 
Brayne, Mr 
Bull, Mr J 
Carbines, Mr 
Carroll, Mr 
Cheeseman, Mr 
Connolly, Ms 
Couzens, Ms 
Crugnale, Ms 
Cupper, Ms 
D’Ambrosio, Ms 
Dimopoulos, Mr 
Donnellan, Mr 
Edbrooke, Mr 
Edwards, Ms 
Foley, Mr 
Fregon, Mr 
Green, Ms 
Halfpenny, Ms 
Hall, Ms 
Halse, Mr 
Hamer, Mr 
Hennessy, Ms 
Horne, Ms 
Hutchins, Ms 
Kennedy, Mr 
Kilkenny, Ms 
Maas, Mr 
McGhie, Mr 
McGuire, Mr 
Pakula, Mr 
Pearson, Mr 
Richards, Ms 
Richardson, Mr 
Scott, Mr 
Settle, Ms 
Spence, Ms 
Staikos, Mr 
Suleyman, Ms 
Tak, Mr 
Taylor, Mr 
Theophanous, Ms 
Thomas, Ms 
Ward, Ms 
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 28
Battin, Mr 
Blackwood, Mr 
Britnell, Ms 
Bull, Mr T 
Burgess, Mr 
Hibbins, Mr 
Hodgett, Mr 
Kealy, Ms 
McCurdy, Mr 
McLeish, Ms 
Morris, Mr 
North, Mr 
O’Brien, Mr D 
O’Brien, Mr M 
Read, Dr 
Riordan, Mr 
Rowswell, Mr 
Ryan, Ms 
Sandell, Ms 
Sheed, Ms 
Smith, Mr R 
Southwick, Mr 
Staley, Ms 
Tilley, Mr 
Valence, Ms 
Wakeling, Mr 
Walsh, Mr 
Wells, Mr
BILLS

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 23 February 2022

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Tuesday, 8 March.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr FOLEY:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Government amendments circulated by Mr FOLEY under standing orders.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (11:11): I rise today to speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022 and the house amendments which are being circulated, which I guess are amendments of the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022—amendments of an amendment bill. This bill is wideranging in what it covers off. There are a number of significant but sometimes small changes outlined as part of this bill and the legislation which will come forward from it which will make a big difference to some lives, particularly if you look at some of the amendments in relation to removing specific references to HIV and hepatitis in the legislation, if the bill is passed through both places.

The purpose of the bill is to provide the chief health officer and any other relevant officer with civil statutory immunity if they are act in good faith, shifting the liability from those individual officers to the state. It provides the chief health officer with extra powers in relation to the circumstances in which they can make examination and testing orders. It removes references to HIV and hepatitis C to remove the stigma of those two bloodborne viruses, and it also facilitates expanded testing data collection in an effort to improve infectious disease management, identification and analysis, allowing for a more informed and less restrictive response. That is an area that is of particular interest to me—the great work of pathology companies in how they manage, test and report all of the results that they get but particularly in relation to notifiable diseases. We know that pathology labs have been put under the pump over the past couple of years in relation to COVID.

I will go a little bit further into the background of this legislation before us today before I go into a little more detail around the specific changes which are outlined in this bill under some key themes. In regard to the background, there are certain amendments in this bill which are based on the recommendations arising from the Forsyth Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work of 2016, specifically recommendations 9 and 10, which outline the need for a strengthened definition of ‘prescribed accommodation’ to reflect a wider range of working situations than simply the provision of accommodation by an employer to an employee under an award or a contractual provision. I do not think that anybody would argue that we have those expectations of how workers are treated. It does not matter where it is, whether it is on farm or elsewhere. In defence of all the farmers out there, I think that if any practices have been found to be substandard and you have had 20 people put into a house for accommodation, it has not been the landholders—it has not been the actual property owners and the farmers. It is contractors who have been looking at doing that and getting people through quickly, and it is not up to scratch. We need to be able to treat all people with respect, and it is important in terms of support for the agriculture sector because we know how hard this sector has to work in order to get workers to help them pick the fruit at the right time, when it is ripe and when it is ready, to make sure we can then ship it off and get it packaged up and put on our supermarket shelves. If you do not treat your workers with respect—if you do not treat everybody in that supply chain with respect—then you put enormous amount of pressure on the farmers who are doing the hard yards in making sure we have food on our tables every time we sit down for a delicious meal.

We know that Victorian farmers produce the best food in the nation, if not the world. We are much, much more than just the food bowl for the world; we are probably better referred to as the delicatessen of the world, because on net terms over the globe we produce a smaller amount but we produce a very, very high quality which is highly sought after all around the world.
In my part of the world we generally produce raw product, and we do not actually have a good linkage to or understanding of where that raw product ends up. We ship off our wheat. We ship off our barley. Our legumes we probably recognise a little more readily, and even our canola, but I do like how there are some farmers who talk about their paddocks and their crops in terms of what the end product is. So they will talk about a barley crop being a beer paddock, or they will talk about their durum wheat paddock as being a pasta paddock. A lot of the durum wheat which is grown in my electorate, particularly around the Kaniva area, is shipped unprocessed, and it actually goes to produce San Remo pasta over in Adelaide.

There are many, many opportunities that arise out of this. We could look at developing more processing locally, which would help to support local jobs. It would help take the pressure off businesses who are trying to keep the costs down, by taking them out of the processing centres in the city where land is very expensive, where rates are much higher, and moving them out to the country. We have got great train linkages; we have got great road linkages. Our roads are not up to scratch—we need to have more investment in those roads; there is no doubt about that—but there is so much opportunity in these rural and regional areas to do that upscale packaging and processing, create local jobs and support our rural communities rather than just being an exporter of a raw product.

We do do amazing things in my electorate. I have never heard of any of my local farmers treating workers in inappropriate ways as was found in the Forsyth review, but they have been hit hard, particularly over the restrictions on workers as a result of the vaccine mandate. This is because we desperately need additional workers at certain times of the year, and one of those key points for our region is during harvest. Now, it might not seem like a big thing, but if you have a certain number of the population who are unvaccinated and cannot work, it actually puts an enormous amount of pressure when that one person or group of people are in an area where there is no backup workforce. That is exactly what we saw over the harvest period: workers who would sit on a truck to move grain around—they would sit on a header, be working solely by themselves, all by themselves—unable to do that job simply because they were unvaccinated.

Now, given there would be no front facing, no interaction with another person, let alone a large crowd, it really beggars belief that the government would change the classification—late last year, actually during harvest—of what an essential worker was and therefore change them from not being mandated to be vaccinated to being mandated to be vaccinated. That put an enormous amount of pressure on the harvest period at a time-critical period for people in my electorate.

I am hearing of this still being a problem today, even though that summer harvest period has finished now. I am still hearing from locals that it is so hard to find what used to be called a farmhand—and we now reference those people with the respect that they deserve. ‘Farming operational assistants’ is often the term, which gives them a much higher profile and gives reference to the great knowledge that these people have. They have brilliant skills, and they are so essential in providing support to the operations of any farming business. So we need to make sure that we have got the workers available and that we are able to provide that support to the agricultural industry. They are not in large numbers, but every one of them is critical to be able to achieve that.

As referenced, this element of this bill will go into the minimum standards for accommodation and will make amendments to that. I would like to reference an idea that came out of South Australia. The South Australian government back in 2016 funded a $1.2 million resort built in Paringa on the river, and this is particularly a backpackers resort. The whole intention of this was to build accommodation for fruit pickers that was then able to be utilised during those peak seasons when you need to bring in seasonal workers, but then when there was not work they utilised it for resort accommodation. It has got a fabulous pool, a great gym and a nice open-plan kitchen area, and it is a brilliant place to take families, near to the river, to really enjoy it. So not only then have local businesses got the support of having availability of accommodation, high-quality accommodation, to attract workers to pick the fruit at the right time of the year, but also they have then, as a community asset, got a great accommodation
facility that can help attract people to go and stay on the river in Paringa, have a great time, spend money locally and support local jobs on an ongoing basis.

I think this is a fabulous initiative, and it would be amazing to see the Victorian government supporting our agricultural industries by building some of these on this side of the border here in Victoria. It is not an expensive operation, but with a fundamental investment in those rural communities, where it is so hard to find their local workforce—they simply have to bring people in to assist with fruit picking and other on-farm support over the year—we could look at building some of this work and building some of this in Victoria. We need to see more support when it comes to investing in rural and regional Victoria, because we simply have not seen a lot of it over the past eight years in particular. This would actually take a lot of the pressure off. It would solve a problem which the government is attempting to solve through legislation. It would actually fix the root cause of what some of the issues are.

It is just so hard to get accommodation in rural and regional areas. The cost benefit is not necessarily there from an investment perspective, and so that is always where the government should step in and look to help out. And so I would like to see a rollout of similar types of investments in rural and regional Victoria which can be used as worker accommodation, particularly to support itinerant work where there is not consistent work for a full year-long period. Those off times perhaps can be utilised to boost the local tourism framework, and maybe people can come out and see some of the great sites that we have in my part of the state—see the magnificent art silos or go and look at the Grampians, the West Wimmera wetlands, the Big and Little deserts and all of the amazing things that we have to offer in far western Victoria. It is a great place to live, work and do business, and if you have not been out there recently, please come and visit us, because we will make you very, very welcome.

So with that pitch for additional funding for rural and regional Victoria to support accommodation, I would like to mention Jade Benham up at Robinvale. She has been speaking with us around some initiatives she has got to invest in Robinvale and similar worker-style accommodation, which could provide support for hundreds of people in the Robinvale region around their fruit picking, which is not just citrus fruits; there is also avocado, and there are almond farms in that region. There is about 10 months worth of work every year, and so they need permanent-style accommodation up there. Jade is a fantastic local champion. She comes up with brilliant ideas and looks at things differently, but she is also a solution-driven individual. She does a fantastic job. So thanks, Jade, for bringing that idea to The Nationals, and we will certainly be working with you in the future to try and make some of your ideas a reality.

As per the background, the government has highlighted that the small business regulation review of the visitor economy in 2018 identified reforms to reduce burdens for small businesses whose risk to public health is not proportionate to the regulatory burden. The bill therefore defines and creates a payment category for ‘lower risk prescribed accommodation’, shifting registration from periodic to an up-front payment. This is an important element, because we know that many people have gone ahead with opening up their property to Airbnb and the like. I have heard feedback from some people who offer an Airbnb property that they are finding that this one-off registration fee will be a really big chunk of money for them to pay. We have not heard what that will be from the government, but we are hearing from Airbnb providers that that is actually a significant fee for them to pay. Now, the reason that there are a burgeoning amount of Airbnbs opening up is that people are less and less likely to open up their property to longer term rentals.

It seems like some of the reforms that we have seen from the state government—or attempts at reform and attempts to reform the rental market to make it more secure for tenants and to make sure that there are more rights for the tenants—have actually had a net outcome of meaning that landlords are pulling tenancies off the market. So we have got a very, very low amount of tenancies available, particularly, I am seeing, in my electorate. In Horsham it is exceptionally hard to find a rental property because the market has not been able to keep up when it comes to building more rental accommodation, particularly in the apartment market and targeting either younger people or mums of separated families and victims of domestic violence. There simply has not been that investment to support those smaller
family units. We are looking at ways to try and unlock that, but we are seeing through government tax changes that there are more barriers in place to being able to look at building up our rental properties in the region, knowing that sometimes buying a house is completely out of reach for some people.

But that is being put even further out of reach with the first home owner tax which is coming into play from the government. At this stage it will not be rolled out to my electorate; it is limited to Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and Melbourne. However, we do not know when that could be expanded, because we know this government needs some more money. They have not got enough. They have spent everyone’s taxpayer dollar already, so they are looking at dipping more and more. This new tax—the 41st new tax—will impact most significantly on first home buyers. That is simply not a corner where we should be looking at gaining money. We should be looking to inspire hope and to make sure that Victorians still have that opportunity and still believe that they can buy their first home, not just put additional taxes in place, which will cost about an additional $20 000. Basically all of their deposit is going to be chewed up in tax to go to the government. It is another barrier that we simply do not need to grow home ownership in the state of Victoria.

I would now like to move onto the next element of the bill, which is around expanding the testing data collection specific to pathology companies. Pathology companies have fantastic systems in place, and I would like to just again thank and congratulate the pathology community for the fantastic work that they have done over the past couple of years of the pandemic. While we are all talking about rules and restrictions and lockdowns and what impact they have on us we have had pathology workers and researchers and our leading scientific minds in the state breaking new ground when it comes to developing testing regimes and looking at how we could possibly keep up and immediately get a test that was available, that was reliable, that was accurate and that had a quality assurance and quality control program curated around it to make sure that the results were reliable. They had to set up reporting systems, and we know that there were initially many, many problems with the reporting systems, not because the pathology companies were unable to do this on an electronic basis but because the department simply was not set up to work in a way that it could receive data easily from the pathology companies.

We all know pathology companies release their data very regularly and to various electronic platforms that doctors’ clinics use, hospitals use. There are many, many different products on the market. For whatever reason the Victorian government did not go ahead with the purchase of one of those platforms, which would not have cost them a lot of money. Instead they went back to the old Excel spreadsheet and were keying data in, and that led to an enormous amount of problems over the course of the pandemic, where we saw positive results reported in postcodes that did not actually have a case. It was keyed data; it was human error that resulted in that.

In my electorate of Lowan we had a case which was allocated to a postcode that did not exist. This postcode was set aside expecting mass growth of population in our region—it is a spare postcode, if you would like to think about it that way—but we had a case allocated to it that then had to go into our local government area and created an enormous amount of angst for the community because they did not know anything about this case. The council did not know about the case, the individual communities did not. And this was not about a bit of an exercise of trying to blame anybody for bringing the virus back to their community. People simply wanted to know if that person was okay. ‘Was there a risk that I might have had COVID because I visited them lately? Was it a relative of mine?’ There were questions that were being asked which were quite sensible, and it certainly was not related to a witch-hunt. But it was a keying error, which at the end of the day was because the government did not invest in existing platforms at an early time to receive pathology results from the company electronically in the standardised way that everybody else across the state who accesses pathology results would be receiving them. It took a long time to fix that problem, but I am glad that it was finally fixed.

There are changes in this bill that will change the way that notifiable diseases are reported to the department. At the moment if you find something that is a notifiable disease, whether it is through
bacterial growth, whether it is through viral screening or through other mechanisms, then it is automatically, generally, reported to the department. This is something where there are no humans attached to any of the decision-making around it. If you put in a result of a certain kind which is a notifiable disease, that will automatically copy in the department so that they are notified that one of the notifiable diseases has been detected in the state of Victoria.

My understanding is that the changes to this legislation will give the department more of an oversight into understanding the level of testing that is undertaken, including the number of negative tests, so they can understand how prevalent the disease is. As we can all understand, it is much different to have one positive out of a run of 100 tests than it is to have one positive case out of a testing pool of, say, 10 million negative results, and so in terms of epidemiology and managing infectious diseases this is important data that will assist the chief health officer and the department to better manage notifiable diseases into the future.

There are also elements of this bill which will look to formally address pathology companies forwarding on positive samples which have tested positive for a notifiable disease to be further investigated and identified by tertiary labs, who then will look at sequencing to identify the strain or type of the disease that has been detected. This is something that happens routinely in any case, and I pay utmost respect to all of the scientists who are working hard in pathology. They are not political at all. They are passionate about their jobs. I guess it is not really a job to them, it is really a passion around knowing more and being part of the overall picture of what we understand around the ever-changing face of health and pathology—pathological microorganisms and how they are spread in the community.

As someone who was always a multidiscipline scientist—I did not specialise in any particular area—I was always blown away particularly by the microbiologists. Really their whole lives revolved around understanding different bacteria and different viruses and their prevalence. I was very fortunate to work in the Northern Territory for a period of time, and when I was up there we actually collected all of the positive rotavirus data up there. We would take a sample of that viral material and send it off, and that would form part of the rotavirus immunisation program or the vaccine that was rolled out not just nationally but around the world, and that is because the prevalence of rotavirus and RSV is so high up in the territory. I also had the opportunity, which is really unusual as a scientist, to identify a brand new bacteria when I was living in Alice Springs. It was a spirochete, a gram-negative spirochete. For those who have had a look down a microscope at bacteria before, it was a spiral-shaped bacteria. It was gram negative, so it was pink under the hematoxylin and eosin stain. It was very, very exciting for everybody in the lab to find that we had this brand new bacteria that we were able to identify. So we were exposed to a lot of different things.

It is a different environment. Working as a scientist is something that is highly specialised, and it takes so much dedication by so many scientists to find those diseases. They are excited about it, but most importantly they want to pass on this information. They see themselves as a really important part of building the medical knowledge and the pathological knowledge of various microorganisms not just in their laboratory—it is not just about their own knowledge or their own organisation’s knowledge, they are looking at sharing that amongst the wider community. They are highly collegiate. They work together exceptionally well. And while I understand that there are elements where pathology labs will have to forward on positive material for further analysis to the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory or other tertiary laboratories for further testing of what the type and strain of the bacteria or virus is or the material that has been found, I think that that is happening at an exceptionally high compliance rate in any case. So I understand why it has been put in here; however, in some ways it is redundant because I can guarantee you every scientist that I have ever worked with takes great pride in finding a notifiable disease and forwarding it on and playing their part in the broader picture of how important it is we keep up to date in our knowledge of what diseases are prevalent within our community to make sure that there is a rapid response around that and to better build that picture of the diseases and particularly what microorganisms are causing disease and where it is being spread in our community.
So I understand the reasoning for why this is being legislated; however, I do not believe that legislation will ever have to be utilised, because scientists are doing that work in any case.

There is of course also the removal of references to HIV and hepatitis C in the act, which will help to remove the stigma of those bloodborne diseases or the viruses that cause bloodborne diseases. I think this is important, but also I think—I do not mean to diminish this in any way—that not many people read the act. I mean this with due respect to every single act, but I do not think many people actually read an act from cover to cover. So it is important we make sure our language is consistent in every way and does not unnecessarily identify viruses such as HIV and hepatitis C in a way that would unnecessarily identify that specific group so it is seen that if you have those specific diseases which are specifically named in the act it is much, much worse. We need to take those away; however, in saying that, I do not think many people read these acts at the end of the day. Perhaps even the politicians who speak on some of these bills do not read through the entire act, dare I suggest. But I think it is still a very important step to make sure that we do not treat people any differently just because they have a certain virus. We have learned a lot about HIV and hepatitis over the past decades through, again, the great work of our scientific community. We can now see that they are not any different than any other viruses, so we can take away those references with no net outcome to procedures and how legislatively those things are handled in our scientific communities.

The last element of this bill goes to statutory immunity. All other Australian jurisdictions include protection from personal liability for the chief health officer and other officers who perform functions in good faith under their respective public health legislation, and Victoria will now have a system whereby the chief health officer will be protected from being sued. I note an article that was written in the Herald Sun—I did not bring my glasses, so I have got to hold my arms out straight—which was published back on 8 February and titled ‘New laws may protect chief health officer from being sued’, where they reference the founder of I Cook Foods, Ian Cook, who was deeply concerned about the impacts of this legislation. I am sure many of us are familiar with what has happened with I Cook Foods, where it appears that a slug was planted in a company to deliberately shut it down. I will just reference the comments from Mr Cook that were published in the Herald Sun:

“Facing a $50 million lawsuit from I Cook Foods, the government now decides to change the law to make it impossible to sue Dr Sutton in the future.”

“Why does Dr Sutton need this extra cover from the government, especially for things he does that don’t relate to Covid?”

Mr Cook said the chief health officer should not be above laws that apply to every Victorian.

This is something that is of concern when you have got this instance where questionable decisions have been made without grounds—and which closed down a business by the apparent planting of a slug—which were signed off by the chief health officer, and the implications that it has for so many businesses. The business was shut down because of a suspected listeria case in a sandwich that was actually given to an immunocompromised patient a couple of weeks beforehand. There were no other cases of listeria. They kept on serving their sandwiches and their other food materials to the hospital. There are many elements of this which are highly questionable and need to be examined.

I know that this is a matter which is still going to have other investigation through other courts, so I realise that I cannot go into a lot of detail about that. However, there is concern that the alleged behaviour may continue and that there have been protections for government officers who may be working to turn a blind eye to certain things that are happening, which could cause horrendous outcomes for businesses who have not done the wrong thing. We do need to make sure that this is not about creating unnecessary protections. I do recognise that this will bring Victoria in line with other states; however, I think it is also important that the government provides clarity around the implications and the associations which are being brought forward by members of the public and through the media around the reasoning and the drive behind the changes to statutory immunity.
They are the key elements of the bill. It is broad ranging. They are somewhat significant but also somewhat small in their changes. I again call on the government to make those key investments in accommodation for itinerant workers and also the farming workers that we desperately need to see right across rural and regional Victoria. We need to see an investment from the government in those aspects of our workforce as well. If there are concerns about it, it is one thing to make a legislative change that puts pressure on the private system, but where there is a gap in investment, where we are not seeing the investment in those like large-scale worker accommodation facilities that can make an enormous difference to a community, I really think this is an opportunity for the state government to step in and provide that investment. Let us get more of these facilities on the Victorian side of the border that are akin to the Paringa backpackers resort so that we can get some high-quality infrastructure to help attract workers from overseas to support our fruit picking and our harvesting activities and to make sure that our products can get to market as efficiently as possible.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (11:41): It is my pleasure to rise today to contribute on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. Before I start my contribution in earnest I would like to touch on the amendments circulated by the Minister for Health. On 8 February 2022 the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022 was introduced into the Legislative Assembly. The bill addresses several areas of critical importance to public health, including creating immunity for certain officers, meaning that they will not be personally liable for actions carried out in good faith while executing their duties under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. These changes bring Victoria into line with all other Australian jurisdictions, which already provide protections for the personal civil liability of officers performing public health functions under their respective public health legislation, so at least the legislation will be consistent with that of every other state and territory. In Victoria immunity provisions currently exist in the pandemic context for detention appeals officers, and this bill intends to extend that immunity outside of the pandemic scenario.

Following the second reading of the bill on 9 February, an anomaly was identified in this bill as the term ‘detention review officer’ was used instead of the correct term, ‘detention appeals officer’. The term ‘detention review officer’ is redundant. To rectify this anomaly and align with the bill’s original intent we need to amend the bill. The amendment will ensure the term ‘detention appeals officer’ is used instead of ‘detention review officer’. Yes, this is a minor clarification. It will ensure that these officers can effectively respond outside of a pandemic context. An example of this could be some kind of biological threat or agent with high transmissibility and mortality, such as smallpox. To eliminate or reduce any risk we may need to exercise emergency powers to rapidly detain certain persons.

Detention appeals officers play an important role in both protecting the rights of individuals and protecting public health. They provide important checks and balances when people are detained when a state of emergency is in place. It is in the public interest to protect detention appeals officers from litigation so they can perform their critical functions to protect the rights of individuals and public health without fear of reprisal and being named in litigation. Immunity for these officers will also provide for consistency across the act as detention appeals officers already have immunity in the pandemic context but currently do not have immunity in the state-of-emergency context despite their role and function being similar in these situations.

Most of us rarely think about the importance of public health until a crisis occurs such as the current pandemic—that certainly captures all of our attention. But public health operates on a daily basis to keep people healthy and safe within their communities, helping ensure we have cleaner water to drink, safe and nutritious food to eat, high-quality air to breathe and access to a broad range of services to promote human health, including vaccines. As a paramedic over many years I often saw the consequences of poor public health and wellbeing outcomes, so I know just how important it is to deliver public health and wellbeing.

Here in Victoria the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 operates as a central piece of legislation designed to protect the health and wellbeing of our community. That act governs activities which are enforced at either a state or local government level, including the control and management of infectious
diseases and microorganisms, pest control, cooling tower systems, immunisation, blood and tissue
donations and the registration of prescribed accommodation at certain businesses.

This bill also strengthens many of these routine public health functions, addressing issues identified in
the recent review of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 as well as constraints in the
act relating to testing and data collection. The bill also delivers on outstanding government
commitments stemming from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work

The bill amends the act to allow for the registration of lower risk prescribed accommodation, reducing
the regulatory burden and costs for the owners of small visitor accommodation, such as bed and
breakfasts, boutique guesthouses and farmstays. It also includes accommodation related to labour hire
arrangements within the prescribed accommodation framework, ensuring that labour hire workers
who support critical Victorian industries are provided with accommodation that meets public
standards, and we have all heard the stories about some of the accommodation that has been provided
to these workers. It expands testing data collection and further analysis powers to help improve our
management and understanding of infectious diseases and the risk to public health. It expands the
circumstances in which the chief health officer may make an examination and testing order for the
monitoring and control of infectious diseases, enabling a more targeted and potentially less restrictive
public health response. It introduces a civil statutory immunity for those officers that we spoke about
before, so this will protect them.

Finally, it removes the stigmatisation and references to HIV and hepatitis C from the act, contributing
to the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to eliminating stigma and discrimination
experienced by people living with hep C and HIV. I can say in my experiences many years ago
practising as a paramedic, the stigma attached to a patient that was HIV or hep C through the 1980s
and 1990s—they were treated like lepers, and it was so inappropriate. I am pleased to see over many
decades that we are now getting treatments that are fantastic. Their life span has increased. Removing
the stigma is so important in regard to those diseases.

I am also very pleased that the bill makes a number of minor administrative and technical amendments,
including recognising the profession of paramedicine in line with this now being a protected profession
under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. The functioning of a strong public health
system in Victoria is fundamental to our state’s ability to prevent the spread of diseases. It delivers
improved and more equitable health outcomes for our community. It reduces hospital admissions and
increases our resilience to future health threats. The amendments in this bill will help contribute to
these crucial functions, ensuring the day-to-day activities of our vital public workforce are grounded
in contemporary best practice reform. Again, I should acknowledge our health workers, our healthcare
workers and our frontline workers through this pandemic for their fantastic efforts in keeping us safe,
and also the scientists, the medical researchers and the pathologists—all of their work to get us through
this terrible pandemic.

Yesterday we had another bill that was spoken about in this house that was protecting workers in
Victoria. Thankfully it is supported by the opposition, and I thank those opposite for their support on
that bill. These amendments that we are debating today also include further protections for Victorian
workers, this time by improving labour hire accommodation. The amendments in this bill protect the
health and wellbeing of labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries such as fruit
picking and harvesting. and again we have heard many, many stories about their efforts but also the
inappropriate accommodation that some have been provided. So this bill will address that.

Obviously the inquiry found that in various ways labour hire workers in Victoria are treated almost
like second-class workers, including through differential treatment for issues like health and safety.
Through some of the consultation in the hearings we heard many stories revealing a strong link
between non-compliant labour hire agencies and workers being provided inadequate and substandard
accommodation. This was particularly common in some rural and regional areas, where workers often
do not get a choice about whether they want to stay at the accommodation provided by the labour hire operators. Unfortunately in some rural and regional areas accommodation options can be very limited for those workers. As I say, they may not have a choice in regard to the accommodation that they end up staying in. The current regulations have no restrictions on the number of bedrooms in a house, meaning that other rooms such as lounge rooms may be used as bedrooms. Local councils have expressed concern about the current lack of consequences for operators doing the wrong thing and taking advantage of vulnerable workers.

I have got very little time left. I just want to acknowledge the efforts of the health minister and his staff in regard to this bill and these amendments. I thank them for obviously their hard work, and I commend this bill to the house.

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (11:51): I am pleased to also rise to speak a little on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, and aren't we all thankful that it is rather uncontroversial public health and wellbeing amendment legislation? We have probably all had enough of those more difficult ones that we have dealt with over the last couple of years with respect to the pandemic. This one is effectively an omnibus bill with respect to public health and wellbeing and covers off on a number of issues.

I do want to say that my concern continues about the way the government has managed health and public health throughout the pandemic and indeed the result that we have had from the pandemic where we now have 81 000 people on elective surgery waiting lists—up from around 50 000 before the pandemic. It was disappointing that, when we asked when we would get back to those sorts of figures and actually get to reduce the elective surgery waiting lists yesterday, the minister just did not answer and indeed chose to blame everything on the commonwealth. That is a concern, and we do need to start to focus on things beyond the pandemic and make sure that we get people through surgery, which in many cases is not at all elective as the term suggests.

This bill covers a range of different circumstances. The member for Melton just talked about the labour hire accommodation aspect of it. I was interested in his commentary about lounge rooms being used as bedrooms and everything. I am sure many of us can remember, having backpacked around the world, being doubled up in bedrooms and apartments and, where working in different locations, not necessarily having the most attractive accommodation. Maybe that does need to be legislated, but certainly those of us who might have been backpacking and living footloose and fancy free did not really care. As long as we had a pillow and somewhere relatively soft—

Ms Kealy: It would be good to have some backpackers back.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, it would be nice to have some backpackers back here in Australia. I guess that is another comment I would make. I note that as part of the second-reading speech the minister said:

The reforms will complement our significant investment to support the Victorian agricultural industry to meet workforce challenges.

Certainly through 2021 there was not much action from the government. As the member for Lowan pointed out, the shortage of labour for the horticultural sector in particular was critical, and this government absolutely dragged its heels on that issue. I think partly because of its concerns about labour hire, it is not an area where it really wanted to help out our farmers at all. Last year I attended some of the farms in the Lindenow Valley with the member for Gippsland East and the member for Malvern, who was the opposition leader at the time, and literally saw crops being harvested, being cut, with a mower because they could not be properly harvested. They simply did not have the labour to do so. That is just heartbreaking. In that particular instance it was celery. I think there was $150 000 worth of celery just ploughed into the ground because they could not get the labour. Now, the fact they could not get the labour is not the Labor government’s fault, but the slow response in trying to help the farm sector address that labour shortage has been terrible, and it continues to this day.
We know that the industry actually put forward solutions and that the government just ignored them in terms of getting new workers in, getting people from the Pacific Islands in, to assist. The government just did not do that. Some people will say, ‘Oh, well, farmers have got to pay better wages. They’ve got to look after their workers better’. Whilst that is true, the reality is if you talk to any of the farmers, particularly in the horticultural sector, it does not matter what they do. They cannot get people to come and work on their farms. That is not an excuse for providing substandard accommodation or treating workers badly; it is just a reflection of the reality that most Australians will not go and do that difficult labour, that hard labour, in the fields and we do require backpackers and others to come in from the Pacific Islands or East Timor to assist our horticultural sector to get the crops off. It is a case of either we do that or we accept that we have to pay more for our goods, and that is not an easy one to address.

I also note that the second-reading speech states straight out that:

Regulation will improve living conditions to protect the health and wellbeing of vulnerable labour hire workers …

I hope the government does not assume that by just making regulations suddenly things are fixed. It does actually need to be addressed, and it needs to be addressed properly. Similar to what I said yesterday in the debate on the Workplace Safety Legislation and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2021, it should not be a case of stick; it should be more carrot, working with farmers and the labour hire industry to ensure they are providing those appropriate living conditions rather than simply coming in and wielding the big stick.

There are other parts to the legislation. The expanded data collection for control and management of infectious diseases—I would not suggest that I could comment on pathology and science like the member for Lowan has, but I would back up her assertion that many of the things in the bill where it expands the notification requirements for pathology services to widen, I guess, what they are providing to authorities are to some degree superfluous given that they do that anyway, that they will pick up any concerns, trends or issues that would be of concern to them. I hope that this clause is worthwhile and not superfluous or onerous for our pathology sector.

There are also some changes to the examination and testing powers of the chief health officer. Again this goes to the issue of some infectious diseases having a reduced risk or no risk of transmission. The bill expands the circumstances in which the CHO can make an examination and testing order to include the likelihood of transmission, and again I hope and trust that is used appropriately and not unnecessarily. There is also a clause that removes direct references to HIV and hep C. The bill does that to try and further remove the stigma associated with those two diseases or conditions. There is an avenue to continue to prescribe specific diseases in regulation, so it is not needed in the legislation.

There are a couple of other things. I just want to touch on the immunity provision—the change to effectively exempt the chief health officer and other officers from personal immunity in performing their functions as long as they are acting in good faith. I think in principle I do not have a concern with that. As the Minister for Health has said, that does bring Victoria into line with other jurisdictions. It is notable that while this will not be retrospective it comes in the wake of the I Cook Foods debacle. We have all heard the evidence that has been presented to now two parliamentary inquiries as well as reported police investigations. I am not across the detail, but what has been presented in those inquiries certainly is of significant concern as to what went on in that circumstance. I note that I Cook Foods is proceeding with action against the chief health officer for his actions at the time of shutting down that business. I know there are many in the community who are very, very concerned about how that particular company and its owner, Ian Cook, were treated, and I note the comments that the member for Lowan read out of Mr Cook about this change to immunity—to say that he is deeply concerned would be putting it mildly as to what has been done.

Of course the changes in the bill do not apply to criminal liability, and any official, including the chief health officer, must continue to be performing their functions in good faith, in which case if they are, any liability that may occur is transferred to the state. I note too that this applies to the chief health officer and delegates and to detention review officers, as listed in the bill—but I note the government
has circulated house amendments to change that to detention appeals officers—and certain other
authorised officers as well. There are a number of elements to this bill. In general they make sense,
and I am happy to confirm that the opposition is not opposing this legislation.

Mr J BULL (Sunbury) (12:01): I am really pleased to yet again have the opportunity to rise in this
great house of the Parliament and to have the opportunity to contribute to a debate on a bill that works
to improve the health and wellbeing of the Victorian community. This bill, the Public Health and
Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, performs a range of functions that I want to go to shortly, but I do,
as other members have done in their contributions this morning, make an observation and a reflection
to acknowledge the incredible work that our healthcare professionals have done right across the state,
particularly of course over these past very difficult two years. Right now we know all of these
healthcare professionals right across the state continue to do a remarkable job in taking care of those
who need it the most.

As I mentioned, we are into our third year of the pandemic, but thankfully over the course of the last
month what we have seen is hospitalisations continuing to fall and third-dose rates of vaccination
continuing to increase. As others have done—as the Minister for Health has done, as of course the
Premier has done and as our health officials have done—we stress the importance, for those who have
not gone and got a third dose of the vaccine, of doing so.

What we know is although these past couple of years have of course been dominated by the global
pandemic, our healthcare system faces continual challenges not just from COVID but from all of the
pressures that we know exist within our healthcare system and which continue. This is a government
that is committed to making sure that it is investing, in each and every budget and at each and every
opportunity, to strengthen the healthcare system right across the state. I do want to take the opportunity
to acknowledge the tremendous work being done right across the system to perform surgeries, to care
for patients, to transport patients, to care for new babies and to support those in rehab and those in
aged care. We know that there is an entire team of people doing this work and it is not just within the
caring roles of the healthcare system, it is also about education and preventative health care, and we
know that it is fundamentally important to our state.

We know that local health care is fundamentally important to our community—and this is not a bill
about the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, but if you consider some of the
key recommendations around that royal commission, making sure that local health care is accessible
when and where you need it is fundamentally important to making sure that people are able to live the
best life they can.

I do just want to reflect upon a meeting I had last week with some local residents in my community.
Health care was front and centre in that discussion, from conversations around this government’s
commitment to local health to investments we have made in Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health
as well as to transforming the Sunbury Day Hospital into the Sunbury Community Hospital—terrific
outcomes for my local community and for communities in the growing north-west.

This is a bill that is about strengthening our healthcare system. We know that each and every year, as
I have mentioned, there have been significant investments made by this government, the Andrews
Labor government. New programs, new initiatives that support our growing state, millions into
upgrading our largest hospitals and community hospitals, as I have mentioned, and new programs that
work on health education and prevention are critically important.

This is a piece of legislation that amends the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to strengthen the
act in relation to prescribed accommodation, data collection and further analysis, as other members
have mentioned in their contributions. It is a bill that introduces a statutory immunity provision for the
chief health officer and certain officers under the act; the bill will provide statutory immunity for the
chief health officer and certain officers exercising functions in good faith under the act. It also expands
the definition of ‘prescribed accommodation’ to include labour hire accommodation and creates a
lower risk prescribed accommodation framework, as others have mentioned. It addresses constraints within the act that relate to testing data collection, which have been more critical to resolve in the current pandemic environment. It removes the stigma of references relating to HIV and hepatitis C, expands the circumstances in which the chief health officer may make an examination and testing order, makes minor machinery-of-government and administrative changes and makes consequential amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 to complement further analysis powers.

This is a bill that obviously contains all of those measures that I have just outlined, all of those functions that we know go to providing quality health care when and where you need it. There are a whole range of different functions. In the remaining 4½ minutes that I have for this contribution I am not going to go into the details of all of those, but I did just want to take the opportunity, as other members have done, to look at improving standards of labour hire accommodation. We know that the government is delivering our extensive reform package to improve the regulation of the labour hire industry, with amendments in this bill protecting the health and wellbeing of labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries such as fruit picking and harvesting. Other members have also touched on these changes in their contributions. We know that the industry has developed over the last 30 years to become a significant employer of Victorian workers and a major contributor to the Victorian economy. We know that the inquiry which was mentioned earlier received just shy of 700 written submissions and heard from 221 individual witnesses over 17 days of hearings, and we know that these were contained in a number of discussions that were had by the government—a range of different provisions through public consultation and hearings. Many stories were heard revealing that strong link between non-compliant labour hire agencies and workers that were being provided inadequate and substandard accommodation.

We know that through the course of drafting this bill there has been significant and important discussion. The government has consulted with a range of stakeholders who have indicated support for the bill. They include the Labour Hire Licensing Authority; rural and regional councils such as Mildura, Swan Hill, greater Shepparton, Latrobe, Baw Baw, Ararat, Surf Coast, Wellington and Moonee Valley; the Municipal Association of Victoria; relevant areas from the Department of Health, including the pandemic legislation reform team; the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions; the Department of Premier and Cabinet; the Department of Treasury and Finance; and the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

All of these provisions, as I mentioned earlier, go to ensuring that this government continues to invest in and bring pieces of legislation, new initiatives, before the house that go to improving the health and wellbeing of our Victorian community. It has been an incredibly challenging two years for the Victorian community and indeed the nation and communities right across the globe. The work of our public health team, the work of our nurses, our ambulance officers, our doctors and all of those within local communities who have each and every day done everything they can to save lives, support the community, promote vaccines and take care of one another is fundamentally appreciated by this government, and I think it should be appreciated by everyone within this house.

We know of course that this work needs to continue; it is not static. We are a government that proudly will always take the advice of experts, will always follow science, will always listen to those who spend a great proportion of their working life studying, researching and analysing. We will always stand with science to make sure that we are using the best evidence possible and the best advice to make sound decisions, because it is these people who indeed through that study, through that analysis, are ensuring that they are providing the best advice to government. I do want to put on the record my thanks, appreciation and acknowledgement for the incredible work that has been done.

This is a bill that is about strengthening our healthcare system. There are a range of measures and a range of changes and initiatives that are contained in this legislation that go to promoting the very best possible health care in the state of Victoria, and I proudly commend the bill to the house.
Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:11): I rise to speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, and it is a pleasure to rise and speak on a health and wellbeing bill that does not have some of the controversies that we were forced to discuss last year under circumstances that were challenging for everyone, especially when we were not given the respect of having enough time given to us to have decent debate. Things were rushed through and debated on the same day as we were given notice of them. So it is good to have this time to be able to consult and look at the effects of these changes.

This bill actually is an omnibus bill that seeks to address multiple issues, including some within the labour hire industry, removing the stigma around HIV and hep C, providing personal immunity to statutory office holders in line with statutory protection coverage in other states and territories and expanding the CHO’s powers for pathology laboratories to provide additional data to the Department of Health and assist with monitoring public health and notifiable disease management. That is actually where I will start.

This is a bill that obviously I find fairly interesting, because we have been managing notifiable diseases quite well for many, many years. I often talk about my health experience here, and I can remember learning in the late 1980s about how we manage tuberculosis. It was a notifiable disease and still is. There are many notifiable diseases, and there is a lot that goes on in the background so we can manage our public health. When you see things like this in the bill, which expands pathologists’ ability to cooperate and work together, I, like the member for Lowan, who has already mentioned it, have great confidence that this is happening very well already. I see the opportunity that this presents to have it in the bill and endorse that; I do not have any issues with it. But it does lead to the challenges we do have, and there are diseases that need to be managed. At the moment—probably for the last few years actually—people might be surprised to hear that syphilis is on the rise, and it is important to know who has got it and how to manage it. But it is also important to make sure we are looking at population, so having this change which allows more data to be looked at to see how many people in certain areas have it and really manage population health much better of course I am going to endorse.

Contact tracing, as I have said in this Parliament already many times, is not new. It is something that the government has had a part to play in with the health department for decades. This year, last year and the year before, yes, I understand we were under enormous pressure, but it is really disturbing that contact tracing was so badly managed and that we had so many instances where people were not given the information that would have been available if it had been managed properly. We now know that the health department in Victoria is the least funded health department in any state of Australia, and that has been going on since way before the pandemic. When you have got a Premier who was a Minister for Health for three years before he became the Premier, it is just really disturbing, particularly during a pandemic, that he knew that so well and did not do what needed to be done to boost that capability—yet other states were able to manage contact tracing. I am actually pleased that they have said that contact tracing is no longer necessary; over the last few days we have had that announcement. But the Labor government seems to be hanging on to this control. People were not using it, but they have left industries like the hospitality industry still having to contact trace.

I had the COVID-19 infection in early January. I did not get contacted by anyone in contact tracing. They did not contact anyone I had been in contact with. It has not been working for a very long time. The thing is people are sick of the control and they want to have the respect for their lives back, and they know we need to do things differently. COVID is real, and we need to make sure we have got the right things in place. But when we do not need things, like the contact tracing that has been changed now, the government needs to be responsive. They say there are going to be scientific decisions around it and we are going to find out more in the next couple of weeks around the mask change, for example, that we heard about yesterday. I do not know too many people that can make much sense of this. Why on earth would you want to have masks on the people behind the bar but not masks on the customers? Why would you have masks on kids from grades 3 to 6 but not year 7 or grade 2?
When a doctor comes in and does a ward round they give you a treatment plan. They have options: they might use an allied health framework to manage a patient, they might use a pharmacological model or a medical model or they might use a surgical approach. But every time you listen to the rationale for their treatment plan, there is science behind it and you can figure it out. Now, we have gone through a pandemic where the medical professionals have just been left trying to work it out, trying to commentate, because we have known for a long time that some of the things just do not make sense. It never made sense to shut down playgrounds, and there was no evidence of the curfew having any evidence behind it.

Whilst it is so important to do things to bring your community with you, and that is why I do not have any problem, for example, with the change in this legislation that helps manage notifiable diseases far more effectively—and we should always improve that—the community need to know that the government is doing it in a way that has the science behind it. I will be interested in two weeks time to see how the government explain some of the changes that they are putting in place, which now they have to do within a two-week framework. I am not convinced we will get proper explanations that medical professionals at the very least will be able to understand. I think we will get a lot of government speak that says nothing but with a lot of words there.

What I think we have seen from this Labor government in managing the pandemic is a really iron-fisted approach. If you say, ‘Well, you know, it kept us safe’, have a look at the states around Australia and ask yourself, ‘If we had such a heavy-handed approach and it worked, how come we’ve got the highest death rate? How come we had the longest lockdowns? How come our kids missed out on the most education, and some will never catch up? How come whole regions were locked down when there was not any disease for miles and supposedly contact tracing would have helped anyway?’.

I just think the secrecy—the lack of health evidence that should have accompanied these changes—is appalling. I think somebody said, ‘This is a government who knows what’s best for you. It knows that you can’t be trusted with the truth, so it doesn’t tell you the truth’, and that is a very powerful quote. But humans are pretty impressive, and I am very amazed and impressed by the community of South-West Coast, the community of Victoria. They have gone and got vaccinated. We have got a 93.94 per cent vaccination rate. We know the importance of boosters. I am very grateful to have been vaccinated. I am very grateful that I was not too unwell.

We do not need to have mandates in place anymore. People have made their decisions. It was about health capability, and our hospitals have that capability. Some people have had terrible health experiences in their life and they will not necessarily feel comfortable. As a nurse, I have always respected that. I have never said, ‘Sorry, obesity is something that is wrong. You’ve made a poor decision, so your overweight situation means that you’re not welcome in the health service, you’re not welcome to have treatments’. It is the same with smoking. These are age-old discussions that we have had in health for years and years. Now that we have got the vaccine rates up and we have got people on board we need a confidence campaign to get people out and about. We need to live with the virus. The mandates have no place anymore, they absolutely have no place.

We here in Victoria are in the worst state because the government have failed the Victorian people drastically. Our children are struggling. We are talking about mental health issues with children. We would not have said those words even 30 years ago, but it is a tsunami now. These kids have been put under enormous pressure. I remember a five-year-old in my life two years ago ran out of the shop we were in together because he was coughing. He was terrified he was going to get into trouble. He actually said to me one night—I was babysitting—he thought we were not allowed to go to grandma’s place because he had heard that and he said, ‘Where do I hide when the police come, Nanna?’. These are the sorts of things our kids have been subjected to.

So let us get on with a confidence campaign, live with the virus, encourage the vaccine and the booster, get rid of mandates and stop being a divisive government. Labor have done enough damage. It is about
moving forward, and I cannot say more clearly: we need a confidence campaign, to get back to real medical interpretation and give people the right knowledge and honesty.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Buninyong, can I remind members that this bill relates to a number of matters, and I would ask members to speak to the bill.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (12:21): I am delighted to rise to speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. Having listened to the most recent contribution, I am a little confused about the relevance there. However, before I go into talking about the substantive nature of the bill I would like to respond to some of the contributions from the other side so far on this bill. There have been some real inaccuracies perpetrated here, and I think it is really important to correct the record.

First up, the member for Lowan made a suggestion that this government did not invest in regional Victoria. I am really looking forward to this afternoon so that we can get down to the real facts about what this government has done in relation to regional Victoria, but suffice to say we have spent four times the amount of money that the previous Liberal government did in the regions. The member for Lowan’s statement that we do not care about the regions will be sorely tested this afternoon, and I very much look forward to it.

But specifically around the bill, this bill does talk about seasonal workforce accommodation and makes some adjustments there, and there were some pretty extraordinary claims from the other side around this. First of all, I would say to the member for Lowan that we have in fact had the seasonal workforce accommodation program, which was a $6 million program, to try and assist with accommodation for the seasonal workforce. To suggest that that is something we need to begin to address—perhaps the member for Lowan would like to look into that scheme and find that, as with most things, this government is getting on and doing it.

The member for Gippsland South did stray into areas around the issues of the seasonal workforce and the lack of workers. It was a pretty extraordinary contribution given that this government has stood very firmly by the agricultural industry to try and solve this problem. In fact it is those on the other side’s mates in Canberra who did not get their act together to pass the visa arrangements ready for workers to support the season’s harvest. So of course as usual it was left to this state government, this Labor state government, to support farmers in the face of that. We delivered an $84 million package of support to the farming industry to help with the attraction and retention of workers. We supported 2100 Pacific workers to come into Victoria. We knew how serious it was, so we created the worker sign-on bonus, and we had 3874 workers receive their first payment. It would be fabulous if those on the other side tried to talk facts when they are looking at this bill—and the facts speak for themselves.

This government has stood by regional Victoria and stood by farmers.

As I say, I am really happy to rise and talk about this bill. There are a few different elements to it, and each of them resonates with me for very different reasons. Of course one of the very important aspects of this bill is to remove historical references to HIV and hepatitis C in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. Look, everyone in this house is probably very familiar with my story of having worked for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in the 1980s. That was an incredibly important time. It was as the HIV epidemic was spreading across the world. What was interesting when I worked for Mardi Gras—I was very young, I was a young media adviser—was I was taught by older and wiser hands. One of the things that they were really conscious of was the use of language because it creates stigma. For example, we were very careful in asking the media not to address people with HIV as victims. You know we do not talk about people being victims of other illness. Inherent in the use of the word ‘victim’ is that in some way you are almost victim blaming, as if people are responsible for their illness. For me that was a really fundamental lesson about how stigma needs to be addressed in the weeds. You know, it is in the small bits that stigma and discrimination occur.

So you might say, ‘Hey, we’re just removing these words out of an act’, but that is an incredibly important act. Why should HIV and why should hepatitis C stand separately, as if to in some way
imply that they are different from other illnesses or that somehow people have earned them? With hepatitis C, medicine has moved on. I lost friends in the 1980s to HIV, and I am delighted that now medicine has moved on and people have a fabulous life expectancy and HIV is manageable. The same goes for hepatitis C. A very, very dear friend of mine has recently been quite literally cured of hepatitis C. The old interferon treatment was pretty brutal, and a lot of people did not use it, but the current medication is a six-week course with no side effects and a complete cure. So that is a fantastic piece of medical work there. But that highlights why we really need to change this bill. The world has moved on, medicine has moved on and indeed so should we.

The other really important part of this bill is around the accommodation issue in the labour hire sector. As I say, we have gone a long way to try to assist in this industry with a $6 million investment to make sure that there is accommodation for seasonal workers. It is really important that we clarify the legislation around this so that people abide by the rules. I mean, some of the notes I was reading suggested that previously there was no regulation on what constitutes a bedroom, so we could have lots of people stuffed in a sitting room and call that a bedroom. I think we would all agree that everyone has the right to decent accommodation, and if this legislation goes closer to providing that, then all hail it.

Another element is around removing some of the red tape for some small business owners. This is really around addressing people who provide the small Airbnb accommodation and bed and breakfasts and so forth. I have got a gorgeous electorate, and I would invite all of you to come along and enjoy everything that the area has to offer. For example, in Ballan there is a beautiful B & B called Graze Ballan. What is particularly special about Graze Ballan is that it is a good old-fashioned B & B in that gourmet food is what it is all about, so you can stay in a very cute old caravan and get fed absolutely delicious food. I am really delighted that this legislation is going towards supporting those small businesses and just removing a bit of the red tape—the red tape being the requirement to register on an annual basis. You will be able to do the one-off registration of your accommodation.

It is an omnibus bill and goes to a range of points, but I think it is interesting that it really reflects this government’s commitment. It reflects this government’s commitment to regional Victoria. I am a very proud regional MP—standing here I can see some other wonderful regional members in the house with me—and I know that this government has worked really hard to work into the regions. Legislation like this around accommodation in the labour hire industry, around Airbnbs and bed and breakfasts, is incredibly important for regional Victoria. I am really looking forward this afternoon to getting into everything that this government has done for regional Victoria. But as I finish off on this bill I would like to, in the deepest and strongest way, commend this bill to the house.

As I say, for me removing the references to HIV and hepatitis C is yet another demonstration of this government’s absolute commitment to equality. It really is an equality issue. Why on earth should some illnesses be picked out and others not? For me that is a very important element of this, but also labour hire workers. I have got two teenage sons. I reckon they are going to be out fruit picking in the years to come, and I will want to know that they are in decent accommodation. I am pleased that this government continues to support seasonal workers by both trying to create a consistent workforce here and assisting in bringing people in. In my closing remarks I commend this bill to the house.

Mr ROWSSELL (Sandringham) (12:31): I also rise today to address the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. As I often do in these contributions, I will start with the punchline. As has been stated by my good friend and colleague the member for Lowan, the opposition will not be opposing this bill. I commend to those reading Hansard and listening along at home the contributions of my colleagues the member for Lowan, the member for Gippsland South, the member for South-West Coast and others on this bill, which I have been listening very closely to; they have been very good contributions.

As other speakers have said, this bill seeks to address multiple issues, including those within the labour hire industry and removing stigma around HIV and hepatitis C. It provides personal immunity to statutory office holders in line with statutory protection coverage in other states and territories and
expands the chief health officer’s (CHO) powers for pathology laboratories to provide additional data to the Department of Health to assist with monitoring public health in instances of notifiable diseases. These are all very good things and things that we believe will contribute in a meaningful way to better health outcomes for all Victorians, which is one of the reasons why our position on this is to not oppose the bill.

The purpose of this bill, as stated, is to provide the chief health officer and any other relevant officer with civil statutory immunity if they are acting in good faith, therefore shifting liability to the state. It provides the CHO with extra powers in relation to the circumstances where they can make an examination and testing order, it removes references to HIV and hepatitis C and it also facilitates expanding testing data collection in an effort to improve infectious disease management, identification and analysis, allowing for a more informed and less restrictive response.

Now, I note that at the commencement of this debate today the government did circulate a couple of amendments to this bill in the name of the Minister for Health. I would be interested to know the reasons for the circulation of these amendments, albeit that they are minor. It is interesting that the government would seek to move amendments to its own bill given it was the government’s bill that was proposed in the first place. Of course there is a tolerance for things to be amended as is required, but you would think that at this stage of the process, with the bill having gone through a drafting process, through a cabinet process and no doubt through a Labor caucus process as well, amendments at this point in the journey of the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022 would be not needed, but in this case they are. I just note with interest and curiosity the amendments moved by the Minister for Health, the member for Albert Park:

1. Clause 24, line 13, omit “Review” and insert “Appeals”.
And similarly:

2. Clause 24, line 28, omit “Review” and insert “Appeals”.

Of course the background to why we are here and the reasons for this bill are that the government says that certain amendments in this bill are based on recommendations from the Forsyth Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work of 2016, specifically recommendations 9 and 10, which outline the need for a strengthened definition of prescribed accommodation:

… to reflect a wider range of working situations than simply the provision of accommodation by an employer to an employee under an award or contractual provision.

We have heard from previous speakers of the impact to the labour hire industry and how this bill will in fact strengthen that industry in relation to public health and wellbeing.

Of course the government has also highlighted the small business regulation review from 2018, identifying reforms to reduce burdens for small businesses whose risk to public health is not proportionate to their regulatory burden. The bill therefore defines and creates a payment category for lower risk prescribed accommodation, shifting registration from periodic to up-front payment. Finally, the bill aims to assist in surveillance, identification of trends and informing of prevention and control measures for future outbreaks of known infectious diseases.

On that last point, I think this is a very critical point in this bill, because we have some recent experience with outbreaks and infection control measures that, frankly, have not gone as well as they perhaps could have in relation to coronavirus, COVID-19—not only our community’s response to that but also the state Labor government’s response to those outbreaks. Throughout the course of summer disappointingly it was almost like contact tracers hung up the charger cables on their mobile phones or their handsets and tucked away into the bottom drawer any spreadsheets that they were working on, because I knew person after person during our summer period just gone who contracted COVID-19 and who did not hear a peep out of the Department of Health or any other government agencies. Look, I know the case numbers were high at that time, but the response to the pandemic has not been a new
thing. It has been here for a couple of years now, and I would have thought that in that period all eventualities would have been considered and catered for—sadly in this circumstance, clearly not.

I guess we can be thankful, we can be grateful, for the fact that the omicron variant of COVID-19 has been less impactful on the lives of Victorians and in our communities than the previous delta strain, and perhaps that is the one saving grace from the ineffective response of health authorities, over the summer period especially.

I also wanted to mention just how important the health system is to my own community. Earlier this week I addressed in a members statement the importance of Sandringham Hospital in my own community. It is a wonderful community hospital—it really, truly is—and it has been our community hospital for six decades or more now. It was established with the funding and the help of local people. That is the history of the hospital. At every major step in the hospital’s journey locals have backed our community hospital. But my deep fear is that going forward the Sandringham Hospital needs a new purpose, it needs a new vision and it needs to have a reason to continue serving our community for the next generation.

I will declare self-interest here: I was born there, my family live just a stone’s throw from it now and I do have two young children. My personal interest, which I am happy to declare to the Parliament, is that I want the Sandringham Hospital to be there for my children when they need it and for their children when they need it also. It is my obligation I feel as the local state member of Parliament to advocate for that eventuality and for that outcome, because I think one thing that we have learned over the last couple of years is that we do not know what will happen in regard to a public health response or a public health circumstance, and we need to be prepared for every eventuality. We cannot be in a position where we centrally locate services for matters of consolidation of resources. A local response is the best response, and that is one of the many reasons why Sandringham Hospital needs a viable future—sure, serving my community, but as part of our broader health system here in Victoria.

I started with a punchline. I will bookend with that as well: this side of the house will not be opposing this bill. It has been an absolute pleasure to contribute to this debate.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (12:41): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate, and it is nice to hear some measured contributions—and of course, as always, some not so measured. But it is interesting, as other colleagues have talked about, that even the phrase ‘public health’ was in so much less use across Victoria by the public and by politicians until the pandemic. Now we have all become mini experts in the concept of public health. Health has always traditionally been a very private matter, but public health is a concept that implies a disease or some threat that goes way beyond one person and to an entire community.

The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 is the principal legislation that governs a whole range of instruments and responses to support public health and to deal with the dangers to that public health: for example, the management of infectious diseases, microorganisms, pest control, cooling towers—I remember decades ago we had a whole bunch of cooling tower issues affecting entire communities in an office building and beyond—blood and tissue donations, the registration of prescribed accommodation and certain businesses. These are all functions of public health, and they are so not visible really, are they, until there is an issue with one of those issues or challenges or threats that I have mentioned. This bill fundamentally seeks to strengthen a range of those responses we have at our disposal to deal with those issues.

I will talk about three aspects in my contribution, but one that is significantly important is effectively addressing market failure. I said yesterday in my contribution to another bill that we are a government—we are a party in fact—that is committed at every opportunity we get to improve the lot of workers, starting from the very basic principle that a worker should be able to come home at night, should not die at work or should not be injured at work and that there should be respect for that worker and their family and their community right through to the other basic principles of worker
accommodation in regional Victoria or wherever else workers may need accommodation because they are not in their normal place of residence.

This bill seeks to improve accommodation provided to labourers by incorporating into the prescribed accommodation model a bunch of accommodation that is provided for labour hire. That again builds on labour hire reforms that we have made in the last couple of years. This will absolutely incentivise workers to come to Victoria both from overseas but also from the rest of the country. You cannot overestimate the importance of word of mouth when it comes to that workforce. They literally have social media pages where they rank the work from fruit picking to other work, and a prospective backpacker or worker goes on those sites and says, ‘Oh, that place is a good place to go and work. They’ll look after you’ or ‘That state is a good state’.

We want to be the pre-eminent state for the support of international and national tourism and also for the support of the agricultural sector. We value the agricultural sector. As my colleague who spoke just before said, we do not just value agriculture, we value regional Victoria. We have more regional members of Parliament in the Andrews Labor government than The Nationals and the Liberal Party. We value regional Victoria—see our announcement on the Commonwealth Games and having a truly regional Commonwealth Games. This model, while it applies to labour hire accommodation across Victoria, is principally one that will land in regional Victoria.

On the other side of the equation effectively is lightening the load on small businesses, again in regional Victoria principally. As others have said, we released the Small Business Regulation Review (Visitor Economy) Action Statement in 2018, which was essentially designed to strip away some of the red tape and onerous obligations on some businesses. One of the things we heard was that those B & B providers in country Victoria had to continue to submit their paperwork for public health registration annually—they had to fill out the forms annually for the local council—but they then had to pay a fee annually. This bill seeks to get rid of that, to do it once, because we will consider those businesses under a different model, a lower risk framework of accommodation, to lower the burden of a mum and dad or a small family running an accommodation service in regional Victoria so they only have to register once in an ongoing fashion for public health reasons with their local council. That is really critical, really important, because some of the best accommodation that many of us have ever stayed in has been those small, bespoke country town accommodations, which are very unique and cannot be replicated. We want to keep them alive; we want to support them. It is not just one-sided, it is not being onerous towards business, it is actually taking a view that is important both in addressing market failure and also in taking pressure off businesses.

In the time I have got left I will speak about two of the other elements which relate to statutory immunity for the chief health officer and other officers who were critical to our pandemic response. Others have made contributions, including the minister, on this that are more detailed than the one I am going to make, but I think it is important because other states have this immunity and it is an important protection to allow those officers to do their jobs in a way that is free of any fear of a civil claim. People can still bring a civil claim, but the immunity is important for them to do their job based on nothing but science and good public health principles, not on political pressure, not on community pressure but based on nothing but science and good public health principles. This is what we are seeking to do with this provision.

I know that is what has governed our pandemic response the whole way through—the sound principles of science and good public health principles. When the member for South-West Coast was up on her feet she said a lot but of little substance. She talked about how Victorians want a science-based approach. I think Victoria’s was the epitome of a science-based approach nationally. We did not cave to the pressure that Gladys Berejiklian and others caved to in Australia. We were absolutely driven by science and good public health principles. That is the brand of this government. That is the brand of the Premier. If you talk about curfew, it is either a compliance issue, an ability to enforce or a public health issue. They were all under the same umbrella, and they worked.
As for the member for South-West Coast’s reference to the lowest public funding of a health department, I look forward to her support and her party’s support of increased funding for public health for hospitals in Victoria. Every year we have been in government, and this is a fact, we have put record funding into health, even as the federal government has continued to retreat from its former fifty-fifty agreement on public hospitals—every year record funding.

I also look to the opposition for their support on the mental health levy. If you are going to talk about funding of health, do not leave out mental health, do not retreat from the hard decision to create a floor of funding for such an important area as mental health. The member for South-West Coast was talking about children suffering from mental health problems. Well, of course they were. Everybody was suffering through the pandemic—globally. I was in the United States last month. There were shops that were closed; there were people that were still dealing with COVID. This is a global pandemic. You cannot on one hand stand there and say, ‘There’s a mental health impact’, and not support a mental health response which is worthy of bipartisan support in Parliament.

We have the most transparent legislation in Australia—that is not just me saying it, that is a bunch of civil society bodies saying that—because of the negotiations we have had in this Parliament both in this chamber and in the other chamber on the most independent, transparent powers in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act to deal with pandemics, to deal with a public response to any crisis in the future. We are so prepared because of the experience we have had and I think because of the hard work of Victorians. We have got through this. Our economy is bouncing back more than any other in Australia. We are doing well, and I commend this bill to the house.

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:51): It is my pleasure to rise and speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. If you were tuning in at home and you got to listen to the previous speaker, the member for Oakleigh, and other members of the government and you heard about what was going on, you would think that our health system in Victoria is absolutely cooking with gas, that we would be gold standard, that there would not be 80 000 people on the waiting list, that there would not be ambulances ramping, that there would not be times when you call 000 and it is a lucky dip as to whether someone would actually turn up, that you would not have a situation where right through the pandemic we have seen our health system in crisis, and specifically—with this legislation that we are talking about today—testing and infectious disease management. You would think after listening to the government that it has been brilliant—‘You know what? I’ve rocked up for my PCR test and within a few days it’s turned up and I’m away. Everything has worked great. New South Wales has been hopeless and everyone else has been hopeless, and Victoria has been the best’. Well, we know that that is wrong. We know that the government has failed. They failed to deliver certainly during the pandemic and before. We know the Minister for Health keeps getting up during question time and saying, ‘Well, the reason why we’ve failed is we’re in the middle of a pandemic, and the 80 000 people that can’t get a vital surgery, the reason why they can’t get that—

Mr Maas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, just to reiterate the words that you said before, I think we have given the member for Caulfield a bit of a run now, but I was wondering if he could return to speaking on the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have asked members to speak to the bill and not to be diverted by other matters, and I ask the member for Caulfield to come back to the bill.

Mr SOUTHWICK: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and I will certainly do that. But I will just say—and certainly no-one interjected when the member for Oakleigh was on his feet—that there is absolutely a different situation in terms of what is reality and what is myth when it comes to our health system. If we look at some of the issues particularly with the bill, one is specifically dealing with facilitating expanded testing data collection in an effort to improve infectious disease management, identification and analysis to allow more informed and less restrictive responses. We would absolutely agree that this is an important part of the bill, but during the pandemic there has been a failure. We have seen that 7000 tests during the summer period were actually tossed out. These were PCR tests to
test people through the laboratories that we are talking about in this bill. They were tossed out because we had a situation that was broken. So people effectively went and got tested, they expected to get their pathology test back and they did not get it back, and a whole lot of the tests had to be tossed out. Further, Victorians were told that their samples were no longer suitable to be tested and also some were mistakenly informed that they were free to leave isolation only to find out that they were positive.

We had a situation of tests being thrown out and people being told to leave isolation—a broken situation when it came to particularly looking at testing of data when it comes to this bill which the government is referring to here. So we know that the government has failed, we know that there has been an absolute mess with this and we all know of many people that had situations like we saw with Helen, who received a text message. Her text message said:

Dear HELEN,

Your COVID-19 PCR sample is no longer suitable to be tested and no result can be provided. If currently symptomatic, assume you are positive and arrange rapid antigen or repeat PCR swab confirmation as appropriate.

Lab Reference number is …

blah, blah, blah—effectively, ‘Good luck; you’re on your own’. And that is what happened. So there has been a failure.

In reference to the situation of the bill providing the chief health officer and any other officers with civil statutory immunity if they are acting in good faith, shifting liability to the state, can I make reference to particularly I Cook Foods and the situation where the poor owner’s business was shut down. We talk a lot about small businesses affected by the pandemic. Well, this gentleman from I Cook Foods, which we have all heard about, Ian Cook, is very, very angry about this situation because it prevents future people from taking legal action when they have been let down by people like the chief health officer, Brett Sutton. We do know of a situation in which Brett Sutton has been named in a potential $50 million lawsuit over his decision to shut I Cook Foods down while investigating a listeria death. I know the laws are not retrospective, so I Cook will still be proceeding with their lawsuit against Brett Sutton, the chief health officer, and the government; that will proceed. But what this does in terms of this change is it effectively does not allow, for people that have been unduly affected or been targeted unfairly, for that to take place. Certainly for Mr Cook, as was said in many instances, no-one should be above the law. I appreciate that we all make honest mistakes; I understand that, but also people do need to be accountable and responsible for these actions that effectively cause such harm. I know others have spoken about mental health, but there is the broader harm as well in terms of people losing their businesses over poor decisions made by government and their officers and their departments. Certainly the government is updating legislation to change civil liability for the chief health officer and other senior department officers and to be able to bring this forward. This is not retrospective, but the pandemic certainly does show us that we have got to ensure that any decisions that are made are accountable, responsible and fair. That is a situation that certainly Ian Cook from I Cook Foods has alluded to.

The pandemic has also taught us just how important the testing pathology labs for public health are, which is certainly what we are talking about in this bill. There have been lots of conversations about many pathology labs that were awarded contracts and lots of things that were done during the pandemic without proper tenders, and it will be very, very interesting in the wash-up to be able to go through and just see how much money has literally washed through the hands of many people and what Victorians got as a result of the money that was stumped up by taxpayers while actually receiving the very poor outcomes that Victoria has had. As I say, we have had the worst deaths in the country—801 deaths—certainly the worst results, the longest lockdowns and a health response that has been very, very poor, including specifically when it comes to testing, when it comes to contact tracing and when it comes to ensuring that we have systems in place. This is not something that has just been through the pandemic. The government has been in power—
Sitting suspended 1.00 pm until 2.01 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

INDEPENDENT BROAD-BASED ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Premier, Victorians have the right to know: has the Premier been interviewed by the anti-corruption commission about suspected corrupt conduct between the state government and the United Firefighters Union?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:02): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. What Victorians deserve is a government that allows integrity agencies to get on with their important work.

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Yes, I would have thought the word ‘independent’ in their title was somewhat of a giveaway. A couple of points: (1) do not hold your breath waiting for anyone on this side to take integrity advice from you, (2) if the Leader of the Opposition wants to know what IBAC has done or not done, he should speak with them.

Mr Guy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, given that IBAC has written to all those witnesses and advised them that they can confirm whether they have been interviewed or not, I asked the Premier a very simple question and ask you to direct him to answer it, or advise him to answer it. It was: has he been interviewed by the anti-corruption commission, yes or no?

The SPEAKER: Order! I heard the question. The Premier is being relevant and has concluded his answer.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): Can the Premier guarantee Victorians that the government will not fight or hinder the release of the Operation Richmond IBAC report into suspected corrupt conduct between the United Firefighters Union and the state government?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:03): I am genuinely grateful for this supplementary question. Again, the word ‘independent’ might well have been a giveaway. They do the work as they see fit, they report as they see fit and they report to this Parliament. I am not quite sure what the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting by posing the question as a hypothetical ‘rule in, rule out’. If you have got an allegation to make, then get on and make it.

Mr Guy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, noting the government spent more than a million dollars to hinder the Ombudsman’s report in previous times, it is a relevant question to ask the government: will they, will the Premier, hinder the release of the IBAC report? That is the question that has been asked.

The SPEAKER: I heard the question, and the Premier is being relevant to the question.

Mr ANDREWS: Not only are the matters canvassed I think at odds with the absolute reality that IBAC is independent and does its work—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Well, you have asked a question about IBAC. I do not write your questions, mate. That is obvious. I do not write your questions—that is very obvious. Blind Freddy’s dog could see that I do not write your questions. But here is my answer: independent—that is what they are, that is what they will always be under this government.

Members interjecting.
The SPEAKER: Order! I heard a comment. I do not know who made it, but I warn members against unparliamentary language.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (14:05): Today I rise to update the house on the recently convened Mental Health Ministerial Advisory Committee, experts the Victorian government has brought together to provide specialist advice on rebuilding Victoria’s mental health system. I thank the member for Oakleigh as Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health for his expertise in chairing that first meeting of the committee. This new expert group will advise on how best to implement the complete rebuild of Victoria’s mental health system. It is a huge agenda that includes to date $141 million for eight youth prevention and recovery care services, $264 million for 20 new local services for adults, $269 million to strengthen and expand our mental health workforce—a plan for thousands of mental health workers over the next decade, and a new mental health and wellbeing act. Their advice will help ensure that every dollar that we invest in the mental health and wellbeing of Victorians brings us closer to the mental health system recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System.

This government seeks out expert advice and then acts on it, whether that is through this committee or by accepting every single one of the recommendations of the royal commission, which told us in no uncertain terms that a levy was critical to funding reform of Victoria’s mental health system. This levy will raise $3.7 billion over the forward estimates, all of it being invested by the Andrews government into mental health services. Cut the levy and you cut mental health services. There is no reform, because you cannot pay for mental health services if you have a massive $3.7 billion black hole in your budget, and that is exactly what the opposition are promising—a $3.7 billion black hole in mental health. We are funding reform of Victoria’s mental health system because Victorians deserve nothing less.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:07): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. Why is the government imposing yet another new tax on young families struggling to build their first home in new suburbs like Lucas, Clyde, Mount Atkinson and Armstrong Creek yet exempting buyers of multimillion-dollar established properties in Albert Park, Carlton, Northcote and Williamstown?

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:08): On this side of the house we are absolutely certain and committed that we want to try and make sure that we can find efficient planning reforms for the sector to try and get more stock to market more quickly and to try and find ways we can do that with a greater level of certainty. It is a package of reforms that we are looking at putting together, and then we are asking in relation to some of that upside that there be a contribution that developers make in order to assist that.

As we indicated yesterday in relation to the support that we provided as a government to first home buyers—I am very happy to run through it—we have got the $500 million Victorian Homebuyer Fund, which is a very practical way to get 3000 Victorians into their own homes. More than 440 people have already received the keys to move in, which I think is an absolutely fantastic outcome.

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, previous rulings from the Chair say that while you cannot direct how somebody answers a question or their content, they are required to speak on the topic asked of them, not generally around whatever they like. The minister has now strayed from answering the question I asked about tax.

Ms Allan: On the point of order, Speaker, I ask that you rule the point of order out of order on the basis that the member has contradicted herself in her own point of order. She made the argument against her point of order in her opening statement—that you cannot direct how ministers answer the
question, and they can be broadly relevant to the question that is asked. So I would ask you to rule the member’s point of order out of order and let the minister continue to answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order because the initial part of question was broad: why is the government doing what the member has asked about. The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mr PEARSON: Thank you, Speaker. Demand has been strongest in the 25- to 45-year-old age group, with most of those approvals occurring in Melbourne and Geelong. We have also abolished stamp duty if you are a first home buyer and buying a house for $600 000 or less. If you are buying a house for between $600 000 and $750 000, there is a tapered stamp duty rate. In relation to 2021, there was a total value of $896 million in relation to those exemptions. We have provided $270 million in first home buyer grants to more than 20 000 households, so we are absolutely standing on the side of first home buyers. That is why we are making these sorts of investments. That is why we are looking at trying to find those ways where we can improve the planning system to reduce the regulatory burden to get more stock to market.

Ms Staley interjected.

Mr PEARSON: The member interjects about a new tax. What we have said is we want to deal with and work with the property sector to find a package of reforms to reduce the cost of that and to get more product to market. We have done that because that is what the sector wanted. The sector wanted greater levels of certainty, and that is what we have done.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I just ask members, who will know who they are, who are shouting across the chamber—on both sides of the house—to cease doing so.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:11): In announcing the government’s new housing tax the Treasurer claimed in the media release:

The change will affect less than 30 per cent of all residential planning permits.

So I ask the Assistant Treasurer: what percentage of Victoria’s total new dwellings built in any year will pay this new housing tax?

The SPEAKER: Order! I will allow the question.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:12): As has been indicated, this is a package of reforms. The government has been working with the sector for some period of time to try and pull this together and bring it together, and we have done it as a consequence of some of the advice that we have received from stakeholders in relation to that. The question is who said in 2020 that low-cost housing could be funded through:

... a flat-rate affordable housing contribution levied through the planning system across metropolitan Melbourne to avoid skewing of market activity between sectors, precincts or specific sites ...

That was Danni Hunter.

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, if the minister does not know the answer, he can say so, but he is not answering.

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

Mr PEARSON: These are wideranging reforms. This is about trying to find the way we can reduce that regulatory burden. Again, these matters will ultimately be a matter for the Parliament to determine, and we will see what happens.

Mr Riordan interjected.
**MINISTERS STATEMENTS: RENEWABLE ENERGY**

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (14:13): I rise to update the house on the incredible progress we have made in driving renewable energy investment across this state. In the last eight years we have seen renewable generation skyrocket from less than 10 per cent in 2014 to 32 per cent last year. We are delivering strong leadership and ambition, which is why we increased our renewable energy target to 50 per cent by 2030, delivering more than 24,000 jobs and lowering power prices for every Victorian.

And what a rousing success our target has been, creating more jobs in renewables than any other state and delivering the largest annual increase of renewable energy generation of any state ever. Just in the past few months we have flicked the switch on the Bulgana Green Power Hub, providing more than 200 megawatts of new wind and another big battery, and in Victoria we have seen the massive 180-megawatt Berrybank wind farm completed.

Over the next year we will see a raft of new projects like Winton solar, Cohuna solar and Dundonnell wind all being completed and getting jobs into local communities. We will be powering the entire government through our second Victorian renewable energy target auction—every school, hospital and metro tram will be powered with renewable energy—investing $540 million in the grid of the 21st century and helping Victorians cut their energy bills and get power stations on their roofs. If you had those opposite sitting on this side, you would have none of this—none of the jobs, none of the new renewable power and none of the lower prices.

We are also making Victoria the home of offshore wind in Australia, supporting three offshore wind projects that aim to deliver the massive next wave of renewable jobs. There are those who do and then there are those who do not, and then there are those who just talk. Only a Labor government delivers real outcomes, and we are not wasting a single day in doing just that and more.

**SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (14:15): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. A four-bedroom home on a 400-square-metre block as a house and land package in Clyde sells for an average of $710,000, with more than $200,000 of this being government taxes. How does the minister justify adding a further $20,000 in tax to be paid by struggling first home buyers in Victoria’s growth corridor?

Mr Richardson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mordialloc should maybe not interject across the chamber.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:16): I reject the premise of the member’s question. I mean, the reality is that we have provided sufficient support for first home buyers and we stand on the side of first home buyers. Look, the reality is this package of reforms is going to deliver billions of dollars of profit to developers as a consequence of taking out some of the risk and uncertainty, and by reducing those time lines there will be faster decisions. Now, if the developers are saying they are not prepared to make a modest contribution to affordable housing, then the government will consider its position on these matters.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (14:16): My supplementary question is to the Assistant Treasurer. If Labor’s latest tax becomes a reality—

Mr Andrews interjected.

Mr BATTIN: People in Clyde North will love hearing from you, Premier—love it. Come down and meet them if you would like.

Members interjecting.
The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gembrook, through the Chair, without the assistance of the Leader of the House and the Premier. When the house comes to order. Those at the table!

Mr BATTIN: If Labor’s latest new tax becomes a reality, any young couple who save for years to buy their first home in Melbourne’s south-eastern suburbs will have their entire home deposit wiped out in taxes alone. Assistant Treasurer, how is it fair your government targets Victorians like these, those who have scrimped and saved to get a new start in life, only to have their entire home deposit wiped out by Labor’s taxes?

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:17): Look, I just reject the premise in the member’s question. The reality is—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I warn members on both sides of the house to stop shouting across the chamber.

Mr PEARSON: What we are proposing is to reduce the cost for these businesses to do business. We are going to provide more certainty and reduce their costs, and we are asking that they make a modest contribution. So I reject the premise that the member has suggested. It is just scaremongering.

REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (14:20): My question is for the Premier. Premier, regional media across Australia and certainly here in Victoria has been under threat for several years, brought about by the consolidation of media outlets and a move away from hard copy newspapers due to digitisation and social media. It has been exacerbated during the pandemic, and the rate of change has seen television outlets closing and the remaining newspapers really struggling to stay afloat. Our country newspapers tell our stories, give us the news and put the spotlight on local and other governments. I believe it is a major regional issue, and I have raised it many times in this place. Premier, what are you doing to assist regional newspapers to remain viable?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:21): I thank the independent member for Shepparton for her question, and like her, I agree that regional media, particularly regional and country newspapers, plays a vital role in giving local communities a voice, giving local communities a platform to advocate and making sure that local communities are well informed about what is going on in their part of our beautiful state. All of that is critically important, and I have always been an advocate of more voices in our media, not less. I think that some of the trends in terms of reducing the number of points of view, reducing the number of outlets, reducing some of that competitive tension in what should be not just a contest of ideas but also a contest of what is important—a debate about what are the most important issues—I think the more voices we have, the better. But it is not just a philosophical commitment on my part and the part of the government in relation to more voices.

Mr D O’Brien interjected.

Mr ANDREWS: Sorry?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gippsland South!

Mr ANDREWS: Goodness me. Why aren’t you on the front bench? Why aren’t you on the front bench? That is a very good question.

But they are very significant investments that we have made—not just words but action, real action: $16.5 million in COVID regional press commitments, noting all the points that the member for Shepparton has made about dislocation, about change, about really uncertain times—$16.5 million. Last month, so January 2022, the COVID regional press commitment that I just referred to delivered
from that $16.5 million $397 000 in direct support for regional papers. When combined with all other Victorian government advertising campaigns, our investment was worth some $931 000 to regional press outlets last month.

The editors and owners that I talk to right across regional Victoria—the country press association and individual journalists, editors, owners of regional newspaper outlets—acknowledge just how important that practical support has been. Plus of course the fact that we are not only supporting large campaigns and specific grants but we have given a commitment, and our record demonstrates this, that we will keep on supporting those campaigns. Whether it be in tourism, investment, road safety, fire safety—the list goes on and on—those campaigns and the money I have talked about are critical. I want to see more voices in regional media, not less. And those dollars—not only do you get a great outcome for Victorian taxpayers but you support the very media diversity that I would argue has never been more important than it is right now in these uncertain times.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (14:24): Well, Premier, to get to the point, the publication of government notices in our local newspapers not only provides the public with an accessible opportunity to know what is going on but it provides advertising revenue that underpins the income of many of our regional newspapers. Premier, will you amend your government’s legislation—well, I should say policy—that is proposing to remove the requirement for that publication in the printed press?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:24): I want to thank the independent member for Shepparton for her advocacy on behalf of regional newspapers and regional media on this very issue, just as I should thank my own regional colleagues—a record number of Labor members representing regional Victoria—a true party of regional Victoria. I am very pleased to be able to say that whilst we had intended to enshrine those expenditures and that effort in regs—so in a subordinate instrument—yes, we will, thanks to the advocacy of the member for Shepparton and others, put these matters beyond doubt via an amendment so that there is complete clarity. Not only are we the government that has supported regional media more than any government in the state’s history, but there can be no doubt that that will continue to be our policy. I thank the member for Shepparton, who just gets on and delivers. That is what she does because she is about outcomes, not silly games like some others on that side of the house.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:18): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government’s ongoing commitment to Victoria’s advanced rolling stock agenda and the support of 10 000 new jobs that go with it. We know in 2014 we promised to reduce the peaks and troughs of rolling stock manufacturing. We committed to an ongoing pipeline of rolling stock. Since 2014 we have delivered and continue to deliver $7.5 billion in rolling stock of new trams, trains and buses. The statistics speak for themselves: 114 new metropolitan trains, 47 new regional trains, 150 new trams, 1400 new buses. We have changed the culture of manufacturing in this state, and with the member for Bass I got to see that firsthand last week with the high-capacity Metro Trains. It is Victoria’s first order in 20 years of new trains, the largest single order of new trains in Victoria’s history. Along with 1100 new jobs, it also brings improved accessibility for some of our most vulnerable Victorians, whether it is for wheelchairs, mobility aids, prams or bikes. We are getting on with the job.

We are the envy of the nation, and if you look just north to New South Wales—before they shut down the public transport system this week—last week Dominic Perrottet vowed to build trains locally. The New South Wales Premier said he will end the fraught policy of buying cheap and low priced public transport rolling stock from overseas. Let us hope it rubs off on the other side, because we know after the Kennett government privatised public transport the train orders went to Austria and France. We also know that between 2010 and 2014 we were home to the biggest tram network in the world. How many trams did the Baillieu and Naphine governments order? None. Under the Baillieu and Naphine
governments the ACT had a bigger agenda for tram rolling stock than anyone else. It is number two over there; number one here under the Andrews Labor government.

**MINISTERS STATEMENTS: LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITY**

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:26): I rise to update the house following the very successful Midsumma Festival, which has returned with a huge impact following the disruptions of the global pandemic. This was a three-week celebration of Victoria’s LGBTIQ+ community, both in the run-up right around the state and this important three weeks of activity right around metropolitan Melbourne. Indeed one particular area that I want to call out was the delivery of the government’s election commitment around a festival to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the decriminalisation of sex between men, which was of course by the former Hamer government, when these things were bipartisan. It came about, we had the festival in Collingwood and Fitzroy, and it was a huge success—record crowds and a really good feel.

It came at exactly the same time as there was a very unfortunate debate in the federal Parliament which essentially threw LGBTIQ+ kids under the clickbait bus of the cultural wars that some in this country want to run at the expense of LGBTIQ kids. During that period of time we saw a significant uptick in reports of mental health trauma and support needed for families, whether it be at the Royal Children’s Hospital, mental health online agencies or a range of rainbow family support organisations, not the least being Switchboard—which as one of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System has received over $6 million support from my friend the Minister for Mental Health. All of this is at a time when Victorians need to know they have got support. It is this side of the Parliament, this political party, that supports those communities, not those who attack them.

**HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:28): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. In the Ballarat suburb of Lucas house and land packages for a four-bedroom home start at around $570 000. Labor’s new housing tax will add around $15 000 to this purchase price, and the windfall gains tax is also set to add another $10 000 per block in regional areas. With $25 000 in new taxes added to the cost of a home in regional growth areas, why is it fair that local Lucas first home buyers are going to pay $25 000 more in new state government taxes?

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:28): What we are seeing here from those opposite is they are just reverting to type, because those opposite believe that with the stroke of a pen you create this great uplift in terms of a rezoning, but you do not worry about providing the necessary services for those homes. The area that the member refers to is a growing suburb. You need to fund schools. You need to fund health care. You need to make sure you have got a police station. These things cost money, and you need to make sure that you have got the necessary associated support for these sorts of developments. That is why we need to have these taxation arrangements in place to pay for it, because otherwise you see what happened down at Fishermans Bend, where with the stroke of a pen by the then Minister for Planning there was this immediate uplift. You cannot turn around and then buy the land for a school or for that essential social infrastructure without paying through the nose.

Now, in relation to the figures that the member is quoting, they are speculative. They are speculative because they are premised upon the planning reforms and basically trying to come up with a series of reforms, which we have been working closely with the development sector for a period of time on, including the current CEO of the Property Council of Australia. These things are—

Mr Andrews: If they won’t share their profits, then they won’t make it.

Mr PEARSON: Correct, Premier. If they are not prepared to share their profits and make a contribution towards affordable housing, then clearly we will have to go back and reconsider our position.
Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:30): In this government’s term of office more than $40,000 of new taxes have been added to the cost of the average house and land package, hurting Victorians who are struggling to buy their first homes. Will the Assistant Treasurer give a commitment to back down on this unfair tax grab and stop hurting first home buyers already doing it tough from new taxes imposed by this government?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Barwon can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:31): I do not accept the figures that the member is quoting. What I would say is this government is investing in the things that really matter for Victorians. We are investing in schools, we are investing in hospitals, we are investing in public transport. These are important and necessary investments that we are making. Again, in relation to this package of reforms, that will ultimately be a matter for the Parliament to determine.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:31): I am very pleased to rise to update the house on the tremendous progress we will be making this autumn season on Victoria’s Big Build, on projects right across the state. I know on Monday the member for Narre Warren South was very excited to see the removal of the 58th level crossing, at Clyde Road in Berwick. In the coming months I know the member for Narre Warren North and the member for Pascoe Vale will be very pleased to see the removal of level crossings at Hallam and Glenroy.

Now, some maths. We originally promised to remove 50 dangerous and congested level crossings. We are now removing 85 because we are so far ahead of schedule. To do this we needed to invest more funding. More budget allocation had to be made to remove more level crossings. Now, some argue that removing 85 level crossings should cost the same as 50 level crossings. Some think that doing more level crossing removals and putting more money towards level crossing removals equals a cost blowout. These same people think that if you then add 35 new train stations into the mix, that should also be funded at the same rate as 50 level crossing removals. We know that the Liberal and National parties have opposed every step of the way our level crossing removals, but we are a government that thinks that Victorians in this state deserve to have level crossings removed, deserve to have new stations upgraded and deserve to get the safer, less congested roads that come with those removals.

I will move on. We are doing works on the Monash and the Western Ring Road. We are doing work on Mickleham Road in the north and Western Port Highway in the south. I know the member for Hawthorn is thrilled about the work on the number 72 tram through Malvern. We will continue this investment. We will continue this investment in people and projects, and we know that those opposite will keep on opposing.

Mr Wakeling: On a point of order, Speaker, I just wish to draw to the attention of the house that there are 25 questions on notice and a range of questions that are yet to be answered, and I will table those for the benefit of the Clerk.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for raising that. We will forward those to the relevant ministers and ask for a response.
Constituency questions

RIPON ELECTORATE

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:34): (6216) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Will the minister fund One Red Tree Resource Centre in Ararat to deliver its new collaborative model of psychology training? They have got a model that is with Ararat Rural City Council at FedUni. I recently met with Tammie Meehan and Carly McKinnis, who have put together this model, which will create a new workforce for mental health practitioners, particularly psychologists, in Ararat. This is a fabulous initiative. It is in partnership with FedUni and the Ararat Rural City Council. They are looking for funding. This is the perfect time, in the prebudget time, for the mental health minister to advocate to the Treasurer to get this program the funding that it needs. I absolutely back this. I understand they are going to be on the 7.30 report tonight, and so I encourage all members of the house to have a look at that.

WENDOUREE ELECTORATE

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:35): (6217) My question is for the Minister for Regional Development. Will the minister please advise when the successful applicants for the current round of the Regional Infrastructure Fund will be announced? The RIF provides important funding for regional communities and demonstrates our government’s commitment to all Victorians. In my electorate of Wendouree the RIF has supported a number of transformative projects, including $5 million in funding for the relocation of the Ballarat Showgrounds in 2018. The funding is supporting the Ballarat Agricultural & Pastoral Society’s move to a new purpose-built facility in Mount Rowan. Additionally, the Ballarat Tramway Museum received $2 million through the RIF for crucial track replacement, which will replace ageing track and provide opportunities for locals and tourists alike to enjoy tram rides at beautiful Lake Wendouree. I would like to thank the minister for her strong support for our regional communities, and I look forward to hearing when the announcement of the successful applicants of the RIF will be made.

OVENS VALLEY ELECTORATE

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:36): (6218) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport, and I ask it on behalf of Joanne Mulvaney of Mount Beauty, who is concerned for the future of the Mount Beauty Taxi Service, which is the only form of public transport in the community. Currently the Mount Beauty Taxi Service assists in getting people to local doctor, podiatry and physio appointments etc. The Mount Beauty Taxi Service is an essential service in the community which does not generate enough income to provide a regular wage for the drivers. The owner has indicated that he will not be in a position to continue the taxi service in a normal manner but will continue to provide the vehicles, including maintenance, registration, insurance and taxi fees, to assist the local community or at least continue to have the service. Ninety per cent of the passengers are unable to walk beyond their front fence due to immobility so would not be able to walk to a pick-up point, for example, at the end of their street or a bus stop. I request that the minister work with the Mount Beauty community to establish the best way to keep the taxi service running before the service is lost forever. The current system is working but is unviable, and it would be a tragedy to lose this service for the Mount Beauty community.

ALTONA ELECTORATE

Ms HENNESSY (Altona) (14:37): (6219) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Education, and I ask that the minister provide me with some advice on how new schools could be built with shared-use aquatic centres. Out in the outer west there is great demand in respect of aquatic centres, and certainly we know, particularly from things like drowning statistics, how important it is that we get not just school-aged children but all people from all communities and give them the opportunity to be able to learn how to swim and to be able to enjoy all the wonders that having access to an aquatic education facility would provide. The Point Cook Action Group and
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Legislative Assembly
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Wyndham City Council are very eager for joint-use recreation facilities to be built, particularly with the building of new schools where swimming pools might be available. So my question is: could the minister advise us on the best way to progress, with Wyndham City Council, shared-use aquatic facilities at new schools?

EILDON ELECTORATE

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (14:38): (6220) I have another question for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I refer to the bridge over the Yarra River on Woods Point Road, East Warburton, which does not have dedicated pedestrian access. Will the minister ensure works are undertaken so that there is safe, dedicated pedestrian access across the river? The bridge connects the broader community, but it is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. It is regularly used by students at Millwarra Primary School’s East Warburton campus to cross into Warburton and for the school’s bike education program. Police attendance is requested to stop traffic, which is not always possible, so this is undertaken by school staff and parents, who are sometimes abused verbally by motorists. If the council perhaps had access to the TAC’s annual local government grant program, this could help improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists. Walking and cycling along the Yarra are very popular activities, yet there is no safe crossing point or link between the Warburton trail and the O’Shannassy Aqueduct Trail. The children need to walk on the road.

SUNBURY ELECTORATE

Mr J BULL (Sunbury) (14:39): (6221) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. What is the latest information on construction time lines for upgrades at Langama Park in my community? As the minister will know, it was this government, the Andrews Labor government, who committed $1 million for important upgrades at Langama reserve. Much of the work includes refurbishments to pavilion 2, new lights, new shelters, new change rooms, more storage upgrades and new, upgraded amenities. These will all benefit local cricket, rugby and soccer. This is yet again another example of a terrific upgrade for a local sporting facility within my community, continuing to build upon the Andrews Labor government’s record of getting on and getting things done in Sunbury. Again, I ask the minister for the latest information on this important project.

MILDURA ELECTORATE

Ms CUPPER (Mildura) (14:40): (6222) My constituency question is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the information I seek is about whether the minister is aware of the very successful Doorway program delivered by Wellways in Gippsland and the value it would provide to the Mildura community if it was extended to the north-west. The Loddon Mallee Mental Health Carers Network has identified that access to stable housing is one of the key determinants of mental health for residents in my electorate. Through their shared personal experiences and research they have identified the need for more support for people suffering mental illness to find and keep stable housing. The carers network has identified the Doorway project as a tried and tested, implementation-ready program to address this issue. The program, which has been delivered by Wellways for over a decade, provides a range of practical measures to assist people to maintain their tenancies, delivered through the lens of qualified clinical mental health services. Is the minister aware of the program, and would the minister consider the rollout of this very worthwhile initiative in Mildura?

TARNEIT ELECTORATE

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (14:41): (6223) My question is for the Deputy Premier in his capacity as Minister for Education. For students in the Tarneit electorate who are interested in or indeed passionate about learning and pursuing a career in STEM, Wyndham Tech School is a hidden gem. Whether it is learning about robotics or e-sports development, the things that our kids are learning at this school are simply out of this world. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Wyndham Tech School just last week with students from Hoppers Crossing Secondary College. It was incredible to be there watching the kids learn new skills, skills that will be vital to pursuing these jobs of the future—and I
even got to control a robot or two. In last year’s budget an additional $20.5 million was given to tech schools across Victoria, including ours in Wyndham. This investment aims to improve access to tech schools across Victoria and expand the on-site and virtual delivery capabilities of existing tech schools. So my question for the minister is this: what benefit will this additional funding bring for students in my electorate who visit Wyndham Tech School?

FERNTREE GULLY ELECTORATE

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (14:42): (6224) My question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. I have been contacted by many concerned local small businesses across the City of Knox regarding the planned power outages by energy provider AusNet. This is having a significant impact on these businesses. After two years of lockdowns the last thing Victorian businesses need is more uncertainty over whether they can work. On top of this, global supply chain delays and staff shortages due to COVID are making it difficult enough for businesses to recover. Across Knox local manufacturers had no choice but to close production for the day due to yet another planned outage. This saw tens of thousands of dollars lost and many, many workers unable to work. Many had to use their leave during the pandemic and have had to take leave without pay. Local businesses would like to know: why is AusNet failing to consult with the local community about the timing of planned maintenance outages?

CRANBOURNE ELECTORATE

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (14:43): (6225) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and I ask: can the minister provide an update on the construction of the new primary school in Cranbourne West in the Quarters estate? There are four classrooms of children being born a week into the City of Casey, and we are responding to this growth. The sparkling new Cranbourne West Secondary College is already achieving amazing things, having opened just last year. Principal Rob Duncan and the school students are the pride of our community with their emphasis on inclusion and high achievement. The school’s motto, ‘Strength through diversity’, is certainly being lived out by the leadership and the whole school community. With an enrolment of 457 students in years 7 and 8 just last year, speaking 39 different languages, the work being undertaken by Cranbourne West Secondary College will be enhanced by the arrival next year of the new primary school and early childhood centre at the corner of Morningside Boulevard and Central Parkway. I look forward to updating my community on this important investment in Victoria as an Education State.

Bills

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:45): It gives me great pleasure to rise and to make a contribution on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. Of course it is, as has been said earlier today, an omnibus bill covering several different areas, including providing statutory immunity for the chief health officer and certain officers exercising functions in good faith under the act and expanding the definition of ‘prescribed accommodation’ to include labour hire accommodation to create a lower risk prescribed accommodation framework—I will be going into that particular part of the bill in more detail a little bit later. It also addresses constraints in the act relating to testing data collection that have become more critical to resolve in the current pandemic environment. The bill will also remove residual stigmatising references relating to HIV and hepatitis C, it will expand the circumstances in which the chief health officer may make an examination and testing order and it will make minor machinery-of-government and administrative changes to the act as well as making consequential amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 to complement further analysis powers.
In reading through this bill I was reminded in particular, with the proposed changes to the definition of ‘prescribed accommodation’ to also include labour hire accommodation, of the terrific work that Professor Anthony Forsyth did. I think it was back in 2014 to 2016, with the inquiry into labour hire and more specifically registration of labour hire companies in a Victorian-based scheme. It was interesting to note that other states as well had followed Victoria’s lead, including Queensland and I think the state of South Australia as well before a successive government unfortunately removed the licensing scheme that had been put in place. But the thrust of that inquiry, which then came through into the labour hire registration laws framework, really just addressed what was mounting evidence of exploitation, of underpayment and indeed of many other breaches of workplace laws that had been emerging over several years. I must say it is my fervent hope that in future if other states do not take this up we will have a federal government that I am sure will put laws in place to address this type of exploitation similarly.

Part of the recommendations that came from the Forsyth review was to look into this notion of what accommodation would look like for those working for labour hire companies and particularly those in the quieter parts of the state. It was quite often in the unseen parts of the state where this sort of behaviour happened and where poor standards of accommodation were provided to these workers. So whilst there was an industrial component to it and there was a workplace safety component to it, it yet again speaks volumes of what this government does that it is now looking at the health aspect and addressing this issue through this legislation. It is yet again an example of our Labor government, the Andrews Labor government, delivering an extensive reform package to improve the regulation of the labour hire industry with amendments in the bill protecting the health and wellbeing of labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries—industries such as fruit harvesting and fruit picking.

The labour hire industry has developed over the last 30 years to become a significant employer of Victorian workers and a major contributor to the Victorian economy. There were many high-profile cases that came out as part of the Forsyth review detailing very explicit exploitation of workers, in particular vulnerable migrant workers. The then Minister for Industrial Relations, the member for Sydenham, thankfully announced that inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work in Victoria. There were very many written submissions—some 700 submissions—and some 220-odd witnesses, and many hearings were held throughout 2015 and 2016 across regional and metropolitan Victoria. The final report of the inquiry made it very clear that Victoria’s regulatory framework for labour hire accommodation was failing to capture the substandard accommodation that was provided through labour hire arrangements, conditions such as overcrowding and insufficient amenities. In fact many of the workers, without their permission, had their wages garnisheed to cover that accommodation, and at exorbitant prices. It certainly was not a case of backpacker-type accommodation in terms of the payment that was made—they were paying a really high-end cost for that overcrowded accommodation. To address those arrangements we see the amendments that are coming forth in this bill.

Local councils have identified several issues about the sorts of conditions in these places. They have noted that there has been difficulty in gaining sufficient supportive evidence to prescribe the accommodation that is being provided, including evidence of payment and statements from operators that all residents are family members and the accommodating of a large number of people in standard residential houses not designed or intended to be used in that manner. The current regulations have no restriction on the number of bedrooms in a house, meaning that other rooms such as lounge rooms can be used as bedrooms. Local councils have also expressed their concern about the current lack of consequences for operators doing the wrong thing and taking advantage of these vulnerable workers. As stated by one rural council, the infringements and penalties in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 do not really act as a deterrent, especially if operators are aware of the loopholes.

To address these concerning findings the final report of the inquiry included recommendations that the act be amended to broaden the scope of prescribed accommodation to ensure that labour hire accommodation is regulated under a public health framework. The bill specifically responds to the
recommendations of the Forsyth inquiry, specifically recommendations 9 and 10, ensuring that the accommodation provided to a worker under or in connection with a labour hire arrangement will be required to be registered with the local council and to meet public health standards. This will not only help prevent overcrowding and regulate the numbers of bathrooms and toilets, maintenance, cleanliness and register of occupants but will improve the lives of those workers who are going in each day and, in the vernacular, just trying to make a quid and keep their heads above water.

There are so many other quality parts to this bill which unfortunately I have run out of time to speak to. This is great work that has been put together by the Minister for Health. It is an excellent bill. I commend the work of the department, and I commend the bill to the house.

Dr READ (Brunswick) (14:55): I rise to speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, which makes a number of somewhat unrelated amendments to the act. These are mostly uncontroversial and worthwhile, and the Greens support them. I want to discuss a couple of aspects in more detail, and then I will discuss an amendment addressing a gap in the act.

First of all, I would like to talk about the power to test for the infectiousness of a disease. The chief health officer currently has the power to order a test for the presence of an infectious disease, and HIV is the commonest example. It is very rare that someone would actually refuse an HIV test, and it is rarer still that it would be considered necessary to order one against a person’s will. But a circumstance where this has historically arisen is when a person has had a needlestick injury—say, a healthcare worker—and that needle had been in a person who then went on to refuse an HIV test and a test could be ordered. The reason for the need to test for infectiousness is that now a large percentage of—nearly all—people who are known to have HIV are on a treatment, and if they are on effective treatment then the HIV is not transmissible. If it is not transmissible, then the healthcare worker or the person who is somehow exposed is not required to go on post-exposure prophylaxis therapy. So the need for a test to measure, in this case, the viral load of the so-called source patient would be quite urgent to determine whether they need to treat the health worker. That is a mostly theoretical and occasionally real example of how this might work.

A similar principle applies, for example, in hepatitis C and other bloodborne viruses where the viral load is measurable and where that correlates with infectiousness. But we have seen recently now that all Victorians are epidemiologists. We know that you can get even a cycle count on a nasal swab which correlates roughly with the infectiousness of COVID. While I cannot imagine why you would want to order that in these circumstances, you can see why, of the 70-odd infectious diseases that are notifiable, there might be other circumstances where this is practical. So clause 21 will now allow a viral load or other test of infectiousness to be performed.

Clause 9 of the bill means now that all the details of a test and of all tests, not just positive tests, for any of those 70-odd notifiable infections need to be given to the Department of Health. Currently—let us take chlamydia testing, for example—there are many thousands of chlamydia tests performed, and those results do not go to the health department unless they are positive. If there is a positive chlamydia test, that is notified to the health department, and we see the results as aggregated chlamydia numbers or notifications every three months or every year. For many of the past few years that number of chlamydia tests, or rather chlamydia notifications, has been rising, but for decades we were not sure whether the increase in chlamydia, seen particularly during the late 1990s and into the 2000s, was in part due to an increase in testing or whether it represented a real increase in chlamydia, because the negative tests were not being notified. Some 25 years later we see a legislative solution to this problem, which is that now we get to know about the precise number of negative tests that are ordered.

Interestingly there is one notifiable condition that is not an infection, something I had forgotten about until I was researching this bill, and that is an elevated blood lead level, but otherwise they are all infections. Some of them are rare. A couple of them have even been eliminated. So smallpox is notifiable and SARS is. There are no cases of smallpox or SARS, but who knows, there could be again, so these are notifiable.
Notification forms collect your full name and contact details for all but some of the sexually transmitted infections. On that point, this came up in the briefing given to crossbenchers on Monday. The question was asked as to whether contact details were given to the health department, and identifying details, and the answer was incorrect—in fact they are. Full name, address and contact details are transmitted to the department, except for things like gonorrhoea, chlamydia and HIV. There is a particular problem with a couple of infections, namely hepatitis B and shigella, where full identifying details are transmitted to the health department, but many—or in the case of shigella even most—cases are transmitted by sex, and so the notification form collects details about the mode of sexual transmission, but the full name is currently required by the health department. I would argue that the health department should take steps to make it clear to notifying doctors that the full name is not required in sexually transmitted cases of this infection. I know a lot of doctors simply do not supply the full name, but to make it clear that that is not required would be a step forward I think and would assist in reassuring patients who are understandably concerned about their privacy in these circumstances.

Another really important point about these notifiable infections is that the regulations specify time limits within which the notification must be made. For most infections it is five days, so you need to notify your chlamydia infection or your syphilis infection or whatever within five days, but for urgent cases—think cholera, anthrax, botulism—these sorts of things need to be notified as soon as possible by phone and certainly within 24 hours. I will be talking a bit more about time limits shortly.

But while I support this bill, it has drawn my attention to a significant gap in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. This is something that I actually raised in my inaugural speech when I talked about the public health response triggered if, for example, chocolate mousse in a restaurant caused a salmonella outbreak. In such circumstances investigators from the council would swoop, the samples would be taken from infected diners and from the chocolate mousse, and under no circumstances would anybody be eating any more of that chocolate mousse. Under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, which we are amending, those salmonella cases would be notified to the Department of Health, but there is a tragic inconsistency in this if at the same time officials did nothing when people at a dance party took, for example, what they thought were ecstasy pills but which actually contained a toxic substance like 25C-NBOMe.

We would not let chocolate mousse eaters eat contaminated mousse full of salmonella, but under the current rules we could sit back and let people who we knew were being exposed to a toxin take the same batch of drugs. Now, this is not a hypothetical example. It is not an example I have made up. This occurred in Victoria in 2017, when the police were aware of the presence of a toxin in a circulating batch of pills that were thought to be ecstasy, but there was no public health warning. But I am pleased to say that since giving that inaugural speech there seems to have been a quiet shift in government policy. Since March 2020 the Department of Health has been issuing public drug alerts when toxic substances have been identified by Victoria Police in drugs that are on the market. It is a positive change that might stop the mass overdoses that occurred in 2017 from happening again—and just imagine the outrage if the same informality or lack of concern was shown to road fatalities or infectious diseases. However, with this change in policy there are a few problems. First, not many people are aware of these health alerts, and in particular those who are likely to take the drugs. I suspect that the government may not want too much noise made about it lest they be seen to be allowing pill testing by stealth or, to quote the police, ‘sending the wrong message’. But this is a problem, because silent public health alerts are obviously useless.

The second problem is that unlike notifiable diseases, there is no established mechanism under the act for identifying which substances in drugs should be notifiable based on their risk to public health, nor what details and time frames for drug notifications from Victoria Police to the Department of Health should be. When questioned in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee about the role that Victoria Police play in providing intelligence to the Department of Health regarding these drug alerts, the Chief Commissioner of Police appeared to have limited knowledge of the arrangement and described it as informal, and the weakness of such an informal, seemingly voluntary scheme should
be obvious. Inconsistent, irrelevant or out-of-date intelligence, when received by the Department of Health, means that they cannot warn the right people in time to protect them. That is the very reason why notifiable conditions and microorganisms exist in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act with either 24-hour or five-day time limits, depending on the urgency posed by the threat. Therefore under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

Greens amendments circulated by Dr READ under standing orders.

Dr READ: The amendments will provide that a third category, alongside microorganisms and conditions, of certain drugs, poisons and controlled substances encountered by Victoria Police can be prescribed or declared as notifiable based on their potential serious risk to public health, as defined by the act. The mechanism for prescribing or declaring a notifiable drug, poison or controlled substance is the same as that for notifiable microorganisms or conditions currently under the act. The definition of ‘serious risk to public health’ means that legal drugs such as alcohol or illegal drugs such as heroin, because they are endemic, would not be listed as notifiable in normal circumstances despite their significant and ongoing negative impact on public health.

The mandatory notification requirement for drugs, poisons or controlled substances listed as notifiable will also only apply to members of Victoria Police who encounter the substance in the performance of their duties in law enforcement. This means that the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl, for example, which is likely to be listed as notifiable, will not be notifiable by medical practitioners when it is used as a medical treatment. Victoria Police will be required to notify the Department of Health when they encounter a notifiable drug, poison or controlled substance according to the specific notification details and time lines in the regulations or provisions that relate to the substance. So I imagine things like N-ethylpentylone, paramethoxymethamphetamine—known as PMMA—or 25B-NBOH would be among the first substances listed as notifiable, based on their involvement in mass overdose events and fatalities in Victoria in recent years.

Finally, there is a reporting clause in the amendments requiring Victoria Police to report on the total number and details of drugs, poisons and controlled substance notifications made to the Department of Health in their annual report. This reporting requirement will ensure that we can track the improved communication and cooperation between the Department of Health and Victoria Police under the new arrangements. Unfortunately I am aware that whenever even the most obvious health-based change to drug policy is proposed, such as this, there are those who shut their eyes, shut their minds, wave their arms and like to yell, ‘Just say no!’ So I reiterate: these amendments are not legislating anything that is not already occurring between Victoria Police and the Department of Health. However, they will formalise and strengthen these arrangements so that they are consistent with the best practice regarding notifiable public health risks in the act to maximise the effectiveness of any public health response to specific drug threats. Similar cooperation arrangements occur between the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Drug Enforcement Administration, the DEA, and their laboratories so that they receive timely preventive health information and data to equip and inform evidence-based health responses.

The amendments are also consistent with a key priority of the Victoria Police Drug Strategy 2020–2025 to strengthen cooperation with the Department of Health to support their health focus on drug use. So it is not a new approach, it is about doing what is already happening better—and for this reason I commend all members to support this bill and my amendments.

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (15:09): I am proud to rise today to speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, another important piece of public health legislation delivered by this government in responding to challenges of the pandemic and keeping Victorians safe and healthy. Again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the electorate of Clarinda for their sacrifice, patience and dedication throughout the pandemic. I have been so proud of the way in which the community has risen to the challenges—our frontline workers, our small businesses, our families,
parents and children. It has been an enormous effort from everybody, and I thank everyone for all of those efforts and the way in which the community has worked and continues to work together.

I would like to again say thank you to everyone in the electorate that continued to come forward for their vaccination. Just in the past two weeks, since we were last here in this place, I have seen some really significant increases in the rates of third-dose vaccinations in the electorate of Clarinda. Clarinda residents have been rolling up their sleeves and protecting themselves, their community and of course their loved ones. As of earlier this week, third-dose vaccinations for the Clarinda district postcodes are up again, ranging from 30 per cent to 55 per cent. It is a really impressive effort, and I am sure that we will see those numbers continue to rise over the coming days and weeks. We know the data is clear that getting your third dose will significantly reduce your chance of going to hospital, going to ICU or dying from COVID. The government has been working hard to support the commonwealth vaccination program by calling and texting thousands of eligible Victorians every week to remind them that their third dose is due, including those targeted SMSs for parts of the state where we know third-dose coverage is lower. So we will continue to work closely with community leaders and local health service providers to ensure that everyone eligible for a third dose knows where and how to get one. Again, we know that a third dose is the best protection against COVID-19 for yourself, your family and your community, so if you receive a text message or a reminder or are due for your third dose, I encourage you to please make a booking or walk in as soon as possible.

So this is another important bill here today, a bill that will amend the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to strengthen the Act in relation to prescribed accommodation and data collection and further analysis. The bill also introduces a statutory immunity provision for the chief health officer and certain officers under the Act. I will start with the element of prescribed accommodation.

The bill expands the definition of ‘prescribed accommodation’ to include labour hire accommodation and creates a lower risk prescribed accommodation framework. This is very relevant to many of my constituents, and I am always keen to listen to the contributions made by our colleague here the member for Narre Warren South, for he is passionate about this bill also due to his work prior to coming to this place. I have mentioned many times here in this place also that my electorate, Clarinda, is home to a large amount of labour hire workers, particularly those engaged in the agricultural sector, farmworkers mostly, from our multicultural communities. Many of these workers are employed in the outer suburbs and in Gippsland for most of the year, with some also travelling at certain times of the year for seasonal work to places like the Sunraysia district around Mildura, other areas of the state and even interstate. I am very proud of the labour hire licensing scheme initiated by the Andrews Labor government, as well as our wage theft laws. These are fantastic initiatives that are making a real difference to the lives of many of my constituents.

Some more important changes in this bill include changes that deliver on key government commitments in relation to prescribed accommodation and our commitment to address recommendations arising from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work in 2016. The final report, if I may say, of the inquiry found evidence of substandard, exploitative accommodation arrangements associated with labour hire arrangements and the use of a business model designed to avoid accommodation regulation. Unfortunately this is not uncommon in the industry. Many of the workers come from non-English-speaking backgrounds and their understanding of WorkSafe Victoria and workers rights is very limited.

I remember a case which involved several of my constituents who had travelled to Gippsland for work. The case was raised at the inquiry by the National Union of Workers, now the United Workers Union, who do a power of work organising farm workers in the south-east and of course Victoria, helping these workers to raise their voices and with collective bargaining. The union and workers told the inquiry about Mr Sam Huor, a former director of Chompran Enterprises. Chompran Enterprises was a labour hire agency providing workers to communal farms, and that company was deregistered owing at least $1.2 million in unpaid wages to its former workers. The inquiry was also told at the time that Mr Huor continued to operate once the business was deregistered.
The inquiry heard that many of the overseas workers he was engaging lived in Sale, often with up to 15 people in one residence, with each person paying between $80 and $100 weekly to Mr Huor. There were no inspections, no requirements and 15 to 20 people in a house stacked in like what we call rabbits in a barrel, and all paying $100 per week for rent. The inquiry also heard that often workers do not have a choice as to whether they use the accommodation provided by or through the labour hire operator through which they obtain work.

We can do better, and we must do better for our constituents and for all Victorians. We cannot and will not tolerate this kind of action from individuals and/or agencies like this. These are important changes that will go to addressing the problem with provision of accommodation associated with exploitative accommodation arrangements such as overcrowding. The final report recommended the act be amended to clarify the scope of the prescribed accommodation to ensure that labour hire accommodation is regulated under the public health framework. I am very happy to support this amendment.

Lastly on prescribed accommodation, regarding small business accommodation for visitors, such as bed and breakfasts, boutique guesthouses and farmstays, a new lower risk prescribed accommodation regulatory framework is being introduced here. This will reduce the regulatory burden for lower risk businesses by removing the need for periodic registration requirements, such as annual fees and renewal forms, and facilitate one-off public health registration for small, visitor short-stay accommodation.

As mentioned previously, there is also provision for statutory immunity for the chief health officer and other officers acting in good faith. All other Australian jurisdictions include protection from personal liability for their chief health officers and other officers who perform public health functions under their respective public health statutes, so this bill will bring Victoria into line with these other jurisdictions.

These changes, as mentioned, are all important and sensible changes to improve Victoria’s ability to respond to and evaluate infectious diseases but also to make sure the public health team has the best information and framework to optimise our public health response. I am very proud to support this bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (15:19): I too rise to contribute to the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. The core function of public health is to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of people in the communities in which we live, learn and work. Most of us rarely think about the importance of public health until there is a crisis or we are unwell or, as we have experienced in the last two years, there is a pandemic capturing the attention not only of this state but also the nation and the world.

Public health operates on a daily basis. It keeps people healthy and safe and, most importantly, it also ensures there is cleaner water to drink, safe and nutritious food to eat, a higher quality of air to breathe and access to a broad range of services to promote human health, including vaccines. I am really proud that just recently, in the last few hours, I received a quick photo from my niece from our local secondary college. She is petrified of needles and sent me a photo after she received her two year 7 vaccines. I am extremely proud of her and the other students for getting through the year 7 vaccinations.

We know in Victoria that the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 is a central piece of legislation and is integral to protecting the health and wellbeing of our community. I believe that in this house health and wellbeing is an absolute priority for us all. Of course this bill will strengthen the routine public health functions in the act and help address issues identified in the recent review of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019. As well as some of the constraints in the act relating to testing and data collection, this bill also delivers the outstanding government commitments stemming from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work. Mammoth work has been done in this space.
We also see, in particular in the west and in my electorate of St Albans, that health is the real core and centrepiece of my electorate, with Western Health of course and Sunshine Hospital, which I am extremely proud of. Each and every day the healthcare workers are working very hard in communities, making sure that health and wellbeing are first class. We recently, just last year, opened the new emergency department at Sunshine Hospital, adding to the investment in the new Joan Kirner Women’s and Children’s Hospital. I know that many who experience the service and the care at Joan Kirner Women’s and Children’s Hospital always remark on the level of care and support that mothers receive and in particular that children receive at that hospital. I am extremely, extremely proud.

I do want to also note that the Western Health western metro COVID-19 vaccination program yesterday, on 22 February, had administered a record 1.27 million doses in one year. That is just the western metro COVID-19 vaccination program—so 1.27 million in one year. That is a record and an outstanding vaccination rate.

I also received advice from my local traders today. I am really proud of St Albans market—Big Sam’s. Last week they had the IPC Health team there. They are an amazing team, the IPC team. They had a vax pop-up centre last week at St Albans market. It was that successful—

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I realise it has been a wideranging debate, but vaccination and COVID is not actually directly relevant to the bill that is before us today. I ask you to bring the member back to debating the bill that is in front of us.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Taylor): The debate has been quite wideranging. I do not uphold the point of order.

Ms SULEYMAN: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I was going to note that the IPC Health team has been doing an extraordinary job. Just last week there was the successful pop-up at St Albans Market. They are back again this week from Thursday to Saturday administering vaccines, and that is the essence of this bill—the health and wellbeing of our communities. I want to give a big shout-out to St Albans market owner, Nick, and his team, who have opened their doors to a vaccine pop-up centre, so thank you so much to them.

I have spoken about how proud we are of Western Health and the team there, but I also want to talk about the statutory immunity for public officers. That is really important because during the pandemic we saw, as I have just said, the incredible work of our public health workforce to protect the Victorian community in challenging circumstances. It is not an easy task, and I really am grateful for the work that they do. But these public health officials, including our chief health officer, delegates of the chief health officer and all authorised officers, all undertake the vital work of delivering public health priorities and carrying out the functions of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. Victoria should be doing all we can to attract and retain high-quality people to these roles; it is absolutely integral. However, the possibility of being named in litigation means that skilled and talented public health professionals will sometimes shy away from these positions, and we have seen in the last couple of years what the PR machine can do. No-one should worry about being personally sued simply for carrying out the functions of the job they are employed to do to maintain Victorians’ health and safety. That is the priority here, health and safety, and this bill will introduce a civil statutory immunity for the chief health officer, the delegates and other authorised officers, meaning that they will not be personally liable for actions carried out in good faith while exercising their duties under Victoria’s public health legislation. These changes are absolutely important to make sure that they continue to, without fear, carry out their duties, again for the best health and wellbeing of Victorians. Those are key roles, and that is what needs to continue to be in every decision that we make—the best outcome for the Victorian community.

This is good legislation and secures key public health measures, whether that is important work being done when it comes to testing and tracing or whether it is the work of our public health officers and their delegates, their officers, every single hospital in Victoria, our healthcare workers, our vax pop-
up centres—everybody who is taking on a role for the health and wellbeing of our community. It is about securing our public sector workforce so that more feel that they can step up and make sure that they contribute. But most importantly, our government will continue to invest in, to build and of course to create policy that builds upon our world-class public health system. It is the best not only in the country but also globally, and I know in the west with the investment in Melton and the investment in Footscray when it comes to new hospitals, we are building for the future, not just for today. I commend this bill to the house.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (15:29): It is a great pleasure to follow my friend from the west the member for St Albans. The core function of public health is to promote and protect the health of people and the communities in which we live, learn and work. Most of us rarely think about this stuff until there is a crisis. I recall during my first term in this place, between 2002 and 2006, there were significant reforms of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. It referred to pandemics, and I must admit that I thought, ‘Gee, that is something that happened in previous centuries’. How wrong I was. It really is important that we have robust legislation that is able to support our communities in good times and bad.

The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008—which I should say did not come in in my first term, it was in my second term in 2008—operates as the central piece of legislation designed to protect the health and wellbeing of our community. The act governs activities which are enforced either at a state or at a local government level, including the control and management of infectious diseases, microorganisms, pest controls and cooling tower systems—with legionnaire’s disease. I remember the first time I ever heard of legionnaire’s disease. I remember when Malcolm Fraser was the Prime Minister and he was struck down with it. We have had a number of those legionella outbreaks over the years, especially with the more widespread use of air conditioning than when I was a girl growing up. So it really is important that we have legislation and regulation that ensures those cooling tower systems are maintained well, whether they are in a health system or more broadly in our community. The overall act looks after immunisation, blood and tissue donations and the registration of prescribed accommodation and certain businesses.

The bill strengthens many of these routine public health functions, but it also delivers on outstanding government commitments stemming from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work, which was undertaken and overseen by the now Minister for Crime Prevention with a great deal of passion—and like many of us with a trade union background, it is something that we really see. Someone on that side of the house might say that regulation of employment is unnecessary red tape, but we are really finding now that where we have labour shortages all across the workforce workers are voting with their feet and they are working in industries that have better pay, have better conditions and are safer, and those with work that is more insecure or that is far from home or does not have decent accommodation they are not taking up. I think it just means that we have got to raise the bar, and I think the Minister for Crime Prevention when she oversaw that labour hire industry and insecure work inquiry was really ahead of the game and ahead of where we need to be in the post-COVID environment.

We also have our Small Business Regulation Review (Visitor Economy) Action Statement. I know the Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development has had a real interest in this, overseeing all the regional tourism projects that we are undertaking, but also the review that she oversaw into the regional tourism sector.

The bill amends the act to allow for the registration of lower risk prescribed accommodation, reducing regulatory burden and costs for the owners of small visitor accommodation such as bed and breakfasts, boutique guesthouses and farmstays. It includes accommodation related to labour hire arrangements within the prescribed accommodation framework, ensuring that labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries are provided with accommodation that meets public health standards. Growing up in my late teenage years in Mildura I picked a lot of fruit and I made friends with a lot of pickers that came from interstate, intrastate and overseas. I visited them where they were staying.
Some had great accommodation. Some even to this day sometimes have dirt floors and no mosquito wire on the windows, so then you are at risk of mosquito-borne diseases. There may not even be hot and cold running water. So we really need to look out for people when they are doing work that is important, especially in supplying food, whether it is for locals or for export.

One of the other outstanding election commitments we had was that we wanted to remove stigmatising references to HIV and hepatitis C from the act, which, again, contributes to the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to eliminating stigma and discrimination for all people. It was great to hear from the Minister for Equality in question time today. It is something that we really strive for—to treat all people equally. This stigma has been borne particularly by GLBTIQ people in relation to HIV and also to hepatitis C being identified with IV drug use. So I think it is time that we make those amendments, because it really will have no impact on community health—or will probably improve it because people are more likely to seek help if they are not feeling stigmatised.

The bill also makes a number of minor administrative and technical amendments, including recognising the profession of paramedicine in line with this now being a protected profession under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. I listened quite closely to the contribution by the member for Melton, one of the two parliamentary secretaries for health and, as everyone in this chamber knows, a very longstanding and well-respected paramedic. I was in Inglewood earlier this week to welcome dual crewing to the Inglewood branch of Ambulance Victoria. We have expanded dual crewing not only to Inglewood but also to Avoca, St Arnaud, Rochester, Terang, Camperdown and Beechworth, and that is only in this term. But of course they work closely with ambulance community officers.

With the 2 minutes that I have remaining I want to thank the health workforce for all the work that they have done: doctors, nurses, paramedics, cleaners, administrative people working in the health system and particularly personal care attendants that have done it so hard in the aged care sector—and they are continuing to do it hard. Whenever I am speaking about health I want to make sure that I am passing on my gratitude, and there are so many of those people in that workforce. When all of us here complain—I do it quite frequently, especially on a hot day like today—about having a mask on, I do give myself a reality check and think about all the health workforce that are not just wearing a mask but wearing a face shield, wearing full PPE. I just cannot imagine how uncomfortable that must feel, but they are doing it for the right reasons, and I do want to thank them.

There was something that I did want to refer to in the last little bit. There is a regional workforce pilot project in Robinvale that aims to address key barriers to attracting and retaining an agricultural workforce to the town by identifying linkages between work underway and facilitating greater collaboration between stakeholders in addition to gap analysis for future intervention. There was also a recent amendment to the Victoria planning provisions, which now exempt farm businesses from requiring a planning permit for on-farm worker accommodation for up to 10 people within the farming zone. I welcome this, and I know that the Minister for Agriculture, who is at the table, does welcome this. It is a great piece of legislation. I want to thank the public servants who have been involved in the drafting, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr EREN (Lara) (15:39): Yet again I am very pleased to be standing here today on another fantastic bill before the house. Obviously bills like this are very important not only to individuals within our community in Victoria but also, broadly speaking, to various sectors that are very important to our economy. When you consider the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, contained within the bill are a number of changes to acts for the betterment of the Victorian community. I can say quite rightfully that over the past 2½ or so years, with COVID, people have realised that there is nothing more important than our health and wellbeing. Particularly for those people that are vulnerable, whether they are elderly or indeed have some underlying health issues, it has been a very scary time.
And of course consider all of the community angst that came out of not knowing what COVID was initially. It is a worldwide pandemic. It has topsy-turvyed the whole world on its head in terms of how it does business and how its infrastructure is accommodating viruses like this. Certainly there has been a huge amount of concentration from health professionals, and I want to thank all of those health professionals that are involved in making our society a better place to live, work and raise our families in a healthy manner.

It is really hard when you are in government, whether it is state, federal or local government, at a time when there is a one-in-a-hundred-year pandemic, which is really difficult to handle, especially in the context that initially you are going in blind until you get your act together with the health professionals and get proper professional advice. There are some out there that want to spread misinformation about our public health and wellbeing, which is obviously of concern to the wider community. I think we have felt that over the past 12 months, where a lot of people subsequently were very sick and ended up in hospital. I know my electorate, the north of Geelong, is a very mixed demographic with the elderly, particularly the migrant elderly, and that misinformation goes a long way into unnecessarily making some of these people very sick.

So to that extent I just want to go through why this bill before the house is so important not only for my community in my electorate of Lara but also in relation to the wider Victorian community. For what it is worth, we have got a great state. Prior to COVID we were the leading economy, the engine room for the entire country in terms of jobs growth. The population was growing at about 150 000 per annum, and we were on track. We were humming in many ways. No other government have invested the amounts of money that we have expended in our health system, and of course consider the education system and how we have invested billions of dollars into that sector. Victoria is a great place to live, work and raise your family, and broadly speaking, politics aside, I think people appreciate that and I think people appreciate that we are in a state where really a government is at this point in time thinking about their health and wellbeing. That is exactly what we are doing to give confidence to the communities out there that this government does care in terms of their health and wellbeing.

In Victoria the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 operates as the central piece of legislation designed to protect the health and wellbeing of our community. Most of us rarely think about the importance of public health until a crisis such as a pandemic captures our attention. This bill strengthens many of the routine public health functions, the way we traditionally did things, and where the way we do things now has changed. It addresses issues identified in a recent review of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019, as well as constraints in the act relating to testing and data collection. Of course, a lot of people are concerned about their privacy, yet they are all on Facebook or Instagram or Twitter, where their identity is very well known and their privacy is totally gone whether they like it or not.

Mr McGuire interjected.

Mr EREN: Yes, absolutely, member for Broadmeadows. That is exactly right. And when you consider some of the QR coding that we do and some of the information that we collate to understand the movement of people in relation to where they are frequenting and where the dangers may be present, where we can inform the wider community about the dangers that are present, these are all things that matter to all of us collectively. Of course there are some, again I say, that are on the side of division and cause angst in the community with all sorts of conspiracy theories about their privacy and so on and so forth. This is for the good of the wider, broader community.

This bill also delivers on outstanding government commitments stemming from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work and the Small Business Regulation Review (Visitor Economy) Action Statement. Obviously as the Minister for Tourism and Major Events in the last government I would like to talk a little bit about the importance of this sector. Consider that tourism prior to COVID was certainly one of the biggest job-creating industries in the state, with some 220 000 people that worked within it. When we got into government in 2014 it was worth about
$23 billion to the broader economy. We raised that obviously, that expenditure in tourism, from $23 billion to $29 billion—it was growing, and we had a plan to grow it to $35 billion by 2024.

Obviously COVID put a bit of a stop on that, but nevertheless I do not think anybody in Australia disputes we are the sporting capital, we are the major events capital and we are the cultural theatre capital. We are all of those things, and we will get back there one day—but if we do not have proper regulations, if we do not have proper legislation before Parliament in order to protect and enhance some of these industries, then we are going to be in trouble. That is exactly what this bill does: it prepares us going forward to protect these industries—unlike the federal government, who decided Sunday penalty rates were too much for this sector. You know, they got rid of Sunday penalty rates, and now without the students coming in obviously there is a shortage of workers, who do not want to work in an industry where there is a dead end and that does not pay much, which was the problem from the initial start. If you do not pay people, then people do not want to work in that industry. It is transitional. Everybody says, ‘I don’t want to work in this industry, because it doesn’t pay enough, it doesn’t pay the bills. Until I get a better job I’ll do this, but I won’t stay here’. So this was the dilemma for us collectively in how we deal with this issue in relation to going forward.

Mr McGuire: It’s self-defeating.

Mr EREN: Absolutely—and, you know, at the end of the day those same people when they finish work go to another pub or a bar or a restaurant; they expend that money that they earn back into the industry. So it was, ‘You cut off your nose to spite your face’. What they do now because the penalty rates have gone and the wages are so low is just get their things and go home and get a sixpack on the way home and get a pizza. These are the issues that make our industry very vulnerable, and if we want to grow this industry, we need certain legislation in place to make sure that we look after it and the people that work within this industry.

I wish I had more time—I have got just over a minute left. This is a fantastic bill. There are a number of changes that are being implemented to make sure that we do take care of our community, and that is exactly what this is about. There are improving standards of labour hire accommodation—I just want to put that on the record. The labour hire industry has grown over the past 30 years to become a significant employer of Victorian workers and also a major contributor to the Victorian economy. This bill is another way our government is delivering our extensive reform package to improve the regulation of this industry. In 2015 the Minister for Industrial Relations announced an inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work in Victoria, and we have learned a lot out of that inquiry.

We are proceeding forward in the best way that we can as a government to grow this economy, to make sure that we actually get back those titles that have just stagnated at this point. I am sure we will. The Commonwealth Games will be great in regional Victoria. It is an exciting time to be a Victorian. I am certainly proud to be on this side of the house, and may this legislation have a speedy passage.

Ms HALL (Footscray) (15:49): That was a terrific contribution. I am also pleased to give my support and speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. Of course we know on this side of the chamber that prevention is always better than a cure in health care, and I do not think many of us think about the importance of public health until some crisis emerges that threatens perhaps our food or our water or our air quality. Whilst the COVID pandemic is an obvious example, I also cannot help but think back to the West Footscray warehouse fire that happened about 3½ years ago—30 August 2018. I will never forget that morning. I remember that morning because I was having a baby that morning and my community was on fire—so yes, that was a stressful morning.

In Victoria the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 operates as the central piece of legislation designed to protect the health and wellbeing of our community, and it governs activities which are enforced at either a state or a local government level, including the control and management of infectious diseases, pest control, immunisation and blood and tissue donations, to name just a few. I would at this juncture like to acknowledge my former colleagues at the Victorian organ donation
service, who do such an incredible job—traditionally part of the Red Cross blood service. This bill will strengthen many of these routine public health functions that we take for granted and address issues identified in the recent review of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019. It will formally recognise the profession of paramedicine, in line with it now being a protected profession under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. I would like to acknowledge my colleague, a Parliamentary Secretary for Health and a former paramedic, the member for Melton and note that actually for all of the students of paramedicine the university in our community in Melbourne’s west is the national leader in the delivery of paramedicine—Victoria University. I very much enjoyed meeting the paramedicine students who were working out of Sunshine Hospital, I think it was, last year. I remember speaking to one of the students, who had relocated from Sydney to study in Sunshine, and she said to me that VU was just so highly regarded for its paramedicine course, so I just want to put that on the record as well.

This bill will also deliver on outstanding government commitments stemming from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work and the Small Business Regulation Review (Visitor Economy) Action Statement. This is another example of the Andrews Labor government delivering on its extensive reform package to improve the regulation of the labour hire industry. It is those workers to whom we are so grateful who we should be working to protect. In 2015 the then Minister for Industrial Relations announced an inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work in Victoria after a number of high-profile cases exposing worker exploitation. The 695 written submissions, 221 individual witnesses and 17 days of hearings from November 2015 to March 2016 told us something that these workers already knew, and that was that labour hire workers in Victoria were treated almost like a second class of worker. This included differential treatment for issues like health and safety. The stories shared by these workers revealed a strong link between non-compliant labour hire agencies and workers being provided inadequate and substandard accommodation. This was particularly prevalent in rural and regional areas, where workers often did not have a choice in whether they stayed at the accommodation provided by labour hire operators.

The final report of the inquiry made it very clear that Victoria’s regulatory framework for labour hire was failing to capture this substandard accommodation. Whilst the Public Health and Wellbeing Act outlines that accommodation must be registered with the local council, as the prescribed accommodation regulators, in some cases accommodation was not being registered and therefore was unable to be monitored. One rural council submitted that in the past 12 months it had received 35 formal customer requests regarding accommodation complaints, including issues of cleanliness and overcrowding. You might be wondering how such brazenly non-compliant accommodation could be in use. As one council testified, the infringements and penalties in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act do not really act as a deterrent, especially if operators are aware of the loopholes. This government has a proud history of putting workers’ safety and rights at the front and centre of almost everything it does, and I am so pleased to support this bill, which is going to strengthen those protections further.

This bill responds to recommendations 9 and 10 of the inquiry by ensuring that all accommodation provided to a worker under or in connection with a labour hire arrangement will be required to be registered with the local council and meet public health standards. This will prevent overcrowding and regulate the number of bathrooms and toilets, maintenance, cleanliness and register of occupants. No matter what kind of contract a worker is on, there are minimum standards that should apply to everyone, and to hear reports of companies deliberately flouting these standards or being indifferent to them is very troubling. And just so they cannot claim to be unaware of the expectations, a targeted communication and awareness campaign will also be conducted to ensure the sector is supported to comply with the changes prior to February 2023, when they will commence. This lead-in time will balance the need to supply accommodation for vital industries and protect the wellbeing of workers.

The amendments contained within this bill are not unique to Victoria. The United Kingdom has similar provisions for labour hire agencies for workers in the agricultural and shellfish-gathering sectors. The reforms complement a number of significant investments already delivered by this government to
support the Victorian agricultural industry to meet workforce challenges, including the $6 million seasonal workforce accommodation program, which has backed 13 projects to boost accommodation options, pastoral care and transport services for 2000 workers in key horticultural areas. A regional workforce pilot project in Robinvale aims to address key barriers to attracting and retaining an agricultural workforce to the town by identifying linkages between work underway and facilitating greater collaboration between stakeholders, in addition to a gap analysis for future intervention, and a recent amendment to the Victorian planning provisions now exempts farm businesses from requiring a planning permit for on-farm work or accommodation for up to 10 people within a farming zone.

Another thing this bill does is expand testing data and collection. The pandemic has taught us a lot about how important our testing and pathology labs are for public health. They can act as an early warning system before we even realise there is a problem and help tailor a response once we realise there is one. There are 79 notifiable conditions and 10 notifiable microorganisms, each with specified details required, manner of notification and time frames of notification. The expanded data collection can include but is not limited to negative test results and certain demographic data, such as age, sex and postcode.

With the time I have got remaining I would also like to note that I am pleased that the bill will remove historical references to HIV and hepatitis C in the act, contributing to our government’s commitment to ending stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with hepatitis C and HIV. I remember working on the AIDS conference in 2014 in Melbourne—an amazing event—and one of our key objectives at that conference was to reduce stigma, and I am pleased that this contributes to that.

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (15:59): I rise to speak in support of the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022, and I will see how much time I have got left—30 seconds. Of course public health has never been more important than over the last few years. There is no doubt that the impact and scope of the pandemic has been immensely challenging. It has highlighted the embedded vulnerabilities in our society and put all of our systems to the test. While COVID is still with us, we are now seeing hospitalisation rates fall, vaccination rates rise and our economy reopening. None of these outcomes would be possible were it not for our strong public health system.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (16:01): It is a great honour to rise today to speak on this matter of public importance. Indeed no government has done as much to support our rural and regional communities to thrive as the Andrews Labor government. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues, some of the 18 Labor members that now represent rural and regional Victoria. Of course our government believes that regional Victoria is the best place to live, to work and to visit, and it is no wonder that so many people are flocking to rural and regional Victoria. That is because this government has been consistent since it was first elected. We are delivering more jobs, more schools, better transport, better health care. No other government
has invested as much as this Andrews Labor government has in the good people of rural and regional Victoria. Indeed our last budget allocated $3.7 billion, bringing our total investment in rural and regional Victoria to $30 billion in the time that we have been in government. That is more than four times what the previous Liberal-National government invested in the four years that they sat on the government benches. The people of rural and regional Victoria know that it is only Labor governments that make the investments. It is only Labor governments that build the schools, the hospitals, create the jobs and so on.

As the member for Geelong well knows, there is nothing I love more than visits to industrial estates right across rural and regional Victoria. The member for Lara is over there, where I see the jobs that are being created every day, with this government supporting through our Regional Jobs Fund private sector businesses that go to regional Victoria because they know that they will be backed in and supported by our government. If you look at the latest ABS data, you can see that regional Victoria’s unemployment is sitting now at 3.3 per cent, almost half of what it was when that lot on the other side were last in government, and our flagship Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is a key part of this. Since 2015 it has enabled our government to invest almost $700 million in rural and regional Victoria supporting the creation and retention of jobs.

I want also of course to talk about agriculture. Victoria is the agricultural powerhouse of our nation, and our government is out there every day supporting our farmers in the incredibly valuable work that they do every day. Here in Victoria we are extremely lucky to be a state, despite our small size, that produces more food than we will ever need, and so we are a net exporter of agriculture primary produce to the world, with our food and fibre exports valued at $14.5 billion. And our government supports those primary producers to ensure that we can get their food to market and we can continue to export and grow our rural and regional economy.

In Victoria we are investing more than $140 million in absolutely critical work to strengthen Victoria’s biosecurity system. Our $115 million Victorian agriculture strategy is ensuring that we are backing in those farmers to continue to innovate and thrive in the face of some big challenges, not least of which is climate change. Of course we are also supporting our farmers to take best advantage of the latest in ag technology, and I am delighted also that the member for Buninyong has been leading some fantastic work, the Future of Agriculture Training in Victoria review, to ensure that our public TAFE system is well placed to support the need of the agriculture businesses and to contribute to grow the next generation of farmers here in Victoria.

Talking about young farmers, it is our government that established the Young Farmers Advisory Council. It is our government that established the Young Farmers Scholarship program. Indeed we have awarded scholarships to more than 89 young farmers since 2015, and it is fantastic to meet those young farmers and to hear their stories of the way in which they are working to learn the lessons of the past but to continue to innovate and to create on their farms. Madeleine Marson, for example, from Greater Bendigo is undertaking further training in viticulture and investing in new equipment to support her herbicide-free weed management, while Dougal McAllister is a cropping and sheep farmer from Rupanyup, and he is completing training in business management, leadership and decision-making to improve profitability on his family farm. There is no doubt that our state’s diverse and highly skilled farmers, particularly young farmers, will be at the forefront of Victoria’s economic recovery and growth as we move out of the coronavirus pandemic.

Of course the pandemic has demonstrated to so many what those of us who live in rural and regional Victoria already know. It is a great place to work, live, invest and raise a family, and many Melburnians have taken the opportunity to realise their dream of living and working in rural and regional Victoria—so much so that this has created some challenges of its own. That goes to the supply of appropriate housing—rental housing and housing to purchase—but our government has been ahead of the game. We are investing right across the state to ensure that we are tackling this problem. In fact it is our government that has invested $5.3 billion in the Big Housing Build. A quarter of that funding, $1.25 billion, is going straight to rural and regional Victoria to ensure that those who need it most can
have a home to call their own. This is a flagship investment of the Andrews Labor government, the only government that looks after people that are doing it tough, and that includes those people in rural and regional Victoria.

During the debate on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022 people have talked about the seasonal worker accommodation program. I am delighted that this program and our government’s investment have been providing seasonal workers with appropriate accommodation. We have brought on more beds in places like Boort, in places like Mildura, indeed in Cobram and in Robinvale. We are making sure that seasonal workers have safe and secure accommodation.

We are also investing $111 million in planning reform to cut red tape and boost the construction of private, social and affordable housing. It has been my pleasure of recent times to travel to the Corangamite shire to support that shire in unlocking land for housing development in Timboon and in Simpson. I have been to Ararat, helping that shire unlock land for much-needed housing to support some of the big manufacturing businesses in Ararat. We are delivering, assisting our local governments to unlock land for housing development.

I have talked about Ararat, Timboon and Simpson, and also in Swan Hill we are getting on with the job of assisting local government to unlock that land. Now, Corangamite shire—why wouldn’t people want to travel there? It is such a beautiful place down there on the Great South Coast. Tourism is a key driver of our economy in rural and regional Victoria, and under our government there has been record investment not just in the tourism sector but in the recovery of the tourism sector that has been hit very hard of course by COVID. In 2019 I was very privileged to lead our government’s work into a review of regional tourism, and I was delighted to see that $633 million was committed to supporting tourism in regional Victoria to grow. Under this government what you have seen is investment in some of the most iconic visitor experiences that you can imagine: Mallee silo art, the Grampians Peaks Trail, the visitor experience centre that is coming on at the Twelve Apostles, the Paynesville boardwalk, the centre for photography in Bendigo—you name it—and Budj Bim, which with its World Heritage listing will be a destination that will be visited by people from all around the world. This government is really helping regional Victoria to fly.

I think about our cultural investments. We have the best network of regional galleries anywhere in the world—the Shepparton Art Museum and the Ballarat and Bendigo galleries, you name it; we are investing in and supporting these cultural institutions to grow. In fact I was in Wodonga only last week, and Hyphen, the new library and art space in Wodonga, is absolutely stunning. You could be anywhere in the world, but you are in Wodonga, and you have got access to this first-class, most beautiful facility that will support that community in so many ways.

The Andrews Labor government is there. We stand there every step of the way for the people of rural and regional Victoria. This November the people of rural and regional Victoria will face an important choice. They can re-elect an Andrews Labor government, one that will be with them and continue to invest in rural and regional Victoria, or they can look to the Liberal-National parties. But I would suggest that anyone contemplating a Liberal-National government needs to do their homework, because the proof is in the pudding. You need to look no further than what they did when last they were in government. Let me tell you a little bit about that.

Firstly in 2012 when the member for Murray Plains was the agriculture minister, it is important to know that he oversaw more than 500 job cuts in the Department of Primary Industry. He closed seven regional offices at the Department of Primary Industry. They cut spending on roads by 40 per cent, they cut hospitals, they cut hundreds of schools, they cut funding to health. People remember how Liberal-National governments treat them. No-one will forget when Jeff Kennett called rural and regional Victoria the toenails of the state. Jeff Kennett is still around; he is providing political advice to those on the other side. Let me tell you this: for all that they talk about agriculture—and I will be looking forward to hearing some of it—their latest pamphlet, called ‘Rebuild Victoria’, is 44 pages long, and how many times do you think it talks about agriculture? How many times do you think it
references agriculture? I will tell you. Despite the fact that it is the engine room of the rural and regional Victorian economy, despite the fact that Victoria is the powerhouse of agriculture in Australia—zero times, not at all, not once. It goes to show that the National Party have no influence whatsoever. They are not able to get questions up in here in question time, they cannot deliver in Canberra and they actually fail the people of rural and regional Victoria every step of the way. It is no wonder that there are three seats over there that were once held by National members that are now held by independent members who will speak up for their community.

The people of rural and regional Victoria know what we all know, and that is that the National Party will never stand up for the people of rural and regional Victoria. They will do whatever they are told to do by their Liberal mates. They are not interested at all. The thing that I want to leave you with, if I may, is that it is only the Andrews Labor government that has the best interests of the people of rural and regional Victoria at heart. We will continue to invest in jobs. We will continue to invest in health and new hospitals, including of course in the member for Ripon’s electorate. We will continue to build more schools in regional Victoria, and we will work hard every day to create jobs and to create opportunity to ensure that young people in rural and regional Victoria can fulfil their life aspirations in their home towns. That is what the Andrews Labor government is about, that is what gets us out of bed every day, that is why we have 18 members on this side of the house representing rural and regional Victoria—because it is in our DNA. That is what we do. We govern for the whole of the state, and we recognise how important rural and regional Victoria is.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (16:16): I rise to speak on the matter of public importance in the name of the member for Macedon. I was going to start by talking about how she boasted about all of these areas and how that was all that she had to do—boast—but she did not mention roads, despite it being in the MPI, so clearly roads were not there. Education and health got one sentence at the end, so clearly there is not a lot going on in those areas. And of her 15 minutes she spent 3½ of them attacking either the Liberal-Nationals or the federal government. I would have thought if you are the lead speaker on the government MPI and you want to boast about your perceived achievements across regional Victoria that you could fill 15 minutes doing it, but no, the minister was not able to do that and instead just flipped to those tired old metrics. I love the fact they talk about Jeffrey Gibb Kennett. If you are under 50, you probably do not know who he is unless you are a Hawthorn supporter. I love the fact that the Labor Party is so fixated on one of Victoria’s great premiers. But they remain that way.

I do, however, want to address all of the areas that this government has mentioned in this MPI. I will start with jobs, because the government wants to take great credit for the jobs growth that we are seeing in Victoria and in country Victoria. The problem is it is no better—it is just the same as across the rest of Australia, so I do not think it is this government’s achievements. I would be looking to Josh Frydenberg and his achievement. I think if it is an Australia-wide example of jobs growth, you would have to say that that was through national leadership—national, federal government leadership—and that the government should be very careful in overclaiming what it has not achieved.

Then I will come to country roads. Now, it just so happens that a couple of weeks ago I sent out a survey to several thousand people across Ripon, and many of them came back. I asked them what their most important issues were, and what do you think the number one issue raised by over two-thirds of the people in Ripon was? It was roads. I then had a section where people could have a sort of free-form ‘what is the biggest issue’ and write it out. So here we have got Brad from Creswick. He wants:

Roads and more for youth to do in Creswick.

Kay, she definitely wanted roads:

… especially the western highway. Considering the amount of traffic going from state to state the road at certain parts are absolutely disgraceful.

Ross:

Driving to Ballarat today it was quite noticeable that a lot of work needs to be done on our country roads …
Catherine from Beaufort:

The condition of the roads in the area from Beaufort to Ballarat, including regular roadside slashing to ensure that roads are safe for all vehicles …

Belinda:

The roads. They are no longer able to hold the volume or size of traffic on them ie. truck damage …

John:

Road edges are bad in many places. Holes are left, filled with screenings but none are correctly repaired.

Mr Rowswell: It just keeps going.

Ms STALEY: It does keep going, member for Sandringham, and I have pages and pages of these comments. Peter:

The condition of the roads in country Victoria is disgraceful, safety barriers and “rough road 80Km” signs are of very little help.

This was said over and over again. We had this from Fiona:

Country roads are disgraceful and unsafe.

‘Unsafe’—that is what the people of Ripon are saying to me is their number one issue: the state of Victoria’s roads.

Then we move to tourism and major events. Again, I want to read from an email I received from one of my constituents, and she runs a motel in Central Goldfields:

We have suffered tremendously over the past 19 months and had no consultation with local government or state government.

…

… We, personally, received JobKeeper until December, for one of us and have not had any income from the business since 2019. We are living on a small aged pension …

The mental toll that these never ending lockdowns has had on our staff and ourselves is terrible. Trying to keep abreast of ever changing rules is a worry. We want to abide by the rules, but it is all over the place and not viable.

…

The loss of Energy Breakthrough, Highland Games, Pipe Band Championships and so many regular events is something we will never recover from. It will be more than two years since a major event has taken place in the community.

That is one of many similar letters. That is what my constituents think about how this government has performed when it comes to tourism and major events.

I move to education. I raised this yesterday in a members statement and I will raise it again. St Arnaud Secondary College is having $360 000 ripped out of its rebuilding program and it is being charged to have the demountables removed from the school, some of which it does not actually want removed, but the school getting them is also being charged. So whatever this government is doing when it comes to education, it is certainly not delivering what the people of St Arnaud college want.

That brings me to the secondary schools in Ripon, which are staffed with dedicated, enthusiastic, clever, bright teachers and have great students. It is not the teachers and it is not the students and it is not the principals, so it has got to be the government’s behaviour that has led to a situation where only one school in Ripon had 100 per cent of its VCE students apply to go to university, and they are all going. I have got other schools, and I want to pick out in particular the Maryborough Education Centre. The reason I picked this one is that it has a school disadvantage level of 12. It would have to be the most disadvantaged school in the state. It managed to have 82 per cent of its students apply to go to tertiary education. It is a really great effort, but I have too many other schools where that number is around 50 per cent. There has just not been the support given to schools like, I would have to say,
Ararat secondary college, where 52 per cent of its students applied to go to university, or Charlton, only 50. We have median study scores as low as 24 as the average.

There is great disadvantage across Ripon schools, but that is no excuse. There is Gonski money flowing. This government talks repeatedly about its investments in education; well, we need those investments in regional education to start showing some results for the children who are going to school across Ripon. They clearly need more support. They are disadvantaged compared to the results that are being achieved in some other schools, and the government is clearly not interested, not focused on raising education standards and aspirations across regional Victoria. It is just not good enough.

That brings me to health. I will start with the waitlist, because this government is so keen to talk about how it has delivered in these areas. When the Liberal-Nationals lost government the waitlist for Ballarat Base Hospital was 957 people. It is now 1511—it is up 58 per cent. Under no circumstances, under no scenario, can this government claim that it has delivered on health outcomes for the people of the Ballarat region when its waitlists are up 58 per cent for elective surgery. We remember, I think, that back in June last year it got to the stage where I was forced to stand in question time and ask about John of Buangor who had been waiting for a hip replacement and had a 100-milligram fentanyl patch for that period. John did get his surgery after I raised that in question time. It should not take that, given that we have over 80,000 people on the waitlist for surgery. There are not enough question times available to the Liberals to raise every situation, and it is a huge failure, a massive failure, for all of regional Victoria that we have so many people waiting in pain—absolute pain.

Just last sitting week I did an adjournment in relation to Alison of Donald. She was talking about her grandson-in-law, who was so ill and had black stools. The surgeon wanted to do exploratory surgery, but he could not because the procedure was banned due to the elective surgery bans.

Ms Britnell: He would have been bleeding for sure.

Ms STALEY: Yes, you are a nurse—you would know far better than me. Again we should not be forced to beg for basic health services, which is what this government has delivered.

If we talk about dental—that will be something that the Minister for Health will not be wanting to talk about—in Maryborough there are 1295 people on the public general dental waiting list, and they are on average waiting 53 months to get their teeth fixed. That is debilitating. That is painful. That is life altering actually if you cannot get your teeth fixed for over four years. That is what this government have delivered for regional Victoria, for my electorate: they have delivered a dental waitlist in Maryborough of over four years.

Maybe I will go to ambulances. I do not have a single local government area in my area that meets the targets for ambulances—none. In Loddon the percentage of responses in the most recent quarter under 15 minutes was 20 per cent—it is meant to be 85; in Hepburn it is 39 per cent; in Central Goldfields, 52 per cent; Buloke, 21 per cent. People are dying because they cannot get an ambulance.

This government has an ambulance crisis that it is not finding any way to fix. These are not statistics I am making up. And no-one can stand up and say, ‘Oh, but it was worse under you guys’, because it was not. It actually was not. This government has been in power for years and years, even in this stint seven years, and yet ambulance, dental and hospital wait times in regional Victoria are the worst they have ever been.

Mr Richardson interjected.

Ms STALEY: I hear the member for Mordialloc interject and say, ‘Oh, but you didn’t have a pandemic to deal with’. Well, for five of those seven years nor did the government, and they did nothing. Those dental wait times at Maryborough have been that long for about five years.

So here is a government that wants to just boast, talk and carry on, but when you look at the data, when you look at the results for the people in my electorate and across regional Victoria, this government is
not delivering. It has given up on regional Victoria. The results are there. They have just given up on the people in regional Victoria, and they deserve to be kicked out.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (16:31): I am absolutely delighted to rise to speak on this matter of public importance. It is interesting, you know—we hear the member for Ripon say that the figures are here, the results are here. Well, they certainly are. The results are here in the fact that we have 18 regional members. Now, yesterday when we were voting on government business I was sitting here and I was listening to the count, and the Liberal Party whip said yes or no—whatever it was—18. And I thought to myself, ‘How about that? We’ve got as many regional MPs as they can scrape up members in the house’. So I think really it says it all that our numbers are so strong, and it really is, as this MPI says, because of this government’s continued commitment to delivering for regional Victorians.

There are a few things I want to correct the member for Ripon on—and I will get to those—but one of them she mentioned was she laughed at this sort of conversation around the Kennett era, saying, ‘No-one under 50 will remember’. Well, I come from Ararat. I have family and I have best friends who live in her electorate, and I can tell you what, every one of us remembers Kennett ripping that train out, ripping the train out of Maryborough and out of Ararat—it does not matter your age, you remember that.

In 2001 I came back from the UK. I moved to Ararat to bring my kids up, because I wanted them to have a regional childhood—and do you know what I found? I found my country town, that place that I called home, had been utterly destroyed by Liberals. They took the train out. They sacked all the public servants. Ararat’s population decreased by half. And you know what? That was when I joined the Labor Party. I looked at it and I thought, ‘My God, if those people over there can do this to my regional Victoria, I’ve got to stand up and be counted’. So we do remember the Kennett years in the country. We certainly do remember them.

But the reason we have got so many regional members on this side of the house, I think, is that we really are from the regions, and we continue to live in the regions. I have spent most of my life in regional Victoria. Our Premier grew up in Wangaratta. The wonderful Minister for Agriculture is a Wodonga girl. There is my colleague the member for Wendouree; ask anyone in Ballarat about her family, the Addison family, and they know them, because they are rooted in our community. And of course there is the wonderful member for Yan Yean. We are yet to find a spot in Victoria that she has not got a relative; everywhere they are related to the wonderful member for Yan Yean.

I think that really shows. It shows that we know what regional Victorians want. You know, those on the other side, before the last election they wittered on about fast rail, and what is their other one? They want to decentralise. They have got no idea what regional people want. What we want is schools for our kids that are equal to those anywhere else in the state—and under this government we have got that. So, you know, I hate to be parochial, but let us talk about the wonderful seat of Buninyong.

A member: Be parochial.

Ms SETTLE: I will be. Within my seat every single school has had an upgrade under this government—every single school. But do you know what is really impressive? It is not just the ones in greater Ballarat, it is every small school. There is a wonderful part of my electorate, the Smythesdale-Scarsdale-Haddon area, where they have got what is called Woady Yaloak Primary School. It has four campuses and services all of that area. In the last budget we gave $9 million to upgrade that school. And for Linton in the budget before—beautiful Linton—there was $1 million to upgrade its school. It has probably 20-odd kids or so, but that does not matter to this government. It is not about the size of your school. It is not about your postcode or where you live. Every single solitary kid in this state deserves the best education, and it is only this government that does it.

I was talking to the wonderful Martha Haylett the other day, and Martha of course is a country girl as well. She was fascinated to hear about what is going on at Woady Yaloak Primary School, because she cares about those communities. She really cares, and she knows that we are going to deliver that.
We are going to deliver to that community. I am looking forward to talking more to her about the wonderful things that we can do in that community.

**Mr Edbrooke:** Oh, the wonderful things that we will do.

**Ms SETTLE:** Oh, the wonderful things that we will do. So education—the MPI talks about education, and I think our record is absolutely there.

Now, I want to go back to the member for Ripon. She has been known to be swayed by strange conspiracy theories before, so perhaps this is another one of those. She launched into roads—‘roads, roads, roads’. She had a survey on her website—‘roads, roads, roads’. Under the coalition last time roads spending was cut by 40 per cent. It was extraordinary.

**Mr Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, it is the government’s MPI today, and the government MPI addresses the topic of the government’s record in delivering for regional Victorians, including on roads. At no point in the MPI topic does it seek to compare or contrast that with a former government’s record, and so I would ask you to bring the member on her feet back to the topic at hand as submitted by the government.

**Mr Edbrooke:** On the point of order, Speaker, this debate does allow members to give context and scope to the government’s deliveries as well.

**The SPEAKER:** I am happy to rule on the point of order, because the member is responding to points of debate that both previous speakers have raised.

**Ms SETTLE:** Thank you. In response to the member for Ripon I would like her to know that under the previous Liberal government expenditure was cut by 40 per cent, but of course I am more than happy to talk about what this brilliant government has done in contrast. 6800 kilometres of regional roads have been invested in by this government in Ballarat alone. There is $60.8 million to keep Ballarat moving and the Western Highway duplication, which the member for Ripon will ride upon every day when she goes home. We have, as I say, done 6800 kilometres of regional roads, so we are pretty proud of the $34 billion that has gone into building roads. Those on the other side, last time they were in, did not even start a single major road project—not one. By comparison, if you want to talk regional roads, then I can stand here very proud of this government’s record on regional roads.

Let us go to health. The member for Ripon again had some sort of strange fantasy about how we do not care about Ballarat Base Hospital. Ballarat Base Hospital has an investment of half a billion dollars. Half a billion dollars this government has put into Ballarat Base Hospital. It is an extraordinary hospital. I am delighted to say I had my youngest son there, and it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. It is a fantastic hospital, and to have a half-a-billion-dollar investment shows this government’s commitment to regional health.

In terms of ambulance services, look, I am sorry, if I had had a coffee, I would have spat my coffee when the member for Ripon suggested that under our government things were worse with the ambos. I am sorry that my very dear colleague the member for Melton is not in the house, because I think he would happily, happily dispute that notion that in fact ambulance services and ambulance folk were happy under a previous government. Let us never forget that they went to war with ambulances. Let us never forget that they voted against nurse-patient ratios.

It is only this government, this side of the house, that cares about regional Victoria. I am sorry, it is laughable, but as the first lead speaker pointed out, can you believe that the document that they have published to rebuild Victoria does not mention agriculture? I cannot get over that. Talk to me about a party that cares so little about our people in the regions—and they know it. That is why there are 18 people on this side of the house representing regional Victoria, because it is in our DNA. We do not live in Fitzroy, we do not hang out in the city; we live in our electorates, and we fight for our electorates. And that is why there are 18 regional members of government.
Ms RYAN (Euroa) (16:41): I must honestly express so much gratitude to the member for Macedon for moving this delusional matter of public importance. She has done what no other member of the Labor Party in my time in Parliament has been able to do, and that is cause a dispute in The Nationals party room because we all wanted the opportunity to talk on this fantastic MPI, which just shows how incredibly out of touch and deluded the Labor Party is with the sentiment of regional Victoria.

Members interjecting.

Ms RYAN: You clearly know that you have an enormous problem in regional Victoria. The fact that the Premier of this state will not leave the city without very controlled media opportunities, without being completely wrapped in cotton wool, without telling anyone anywhere where he is going, is demonstrative of the fact that you guys know you are stuffed in regional Victoria, because people know your record, we can see it and we are living it on a daily basis. And the fact that you think that you deserve to be congratulated—

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member to direct her comments through the Chair.

Ms RYAN: The fact that Labor believes that it should be congratulated for a record on jobs, on roads and transport infrastructure, on tourism and major events, on education and on health is not just out of touch, it is absolutely laughable. COVID restrictions have killed businesses in regional Victoria. Look at the interstate migration figures. In the year leading up to June 2021, 18 300 people left Victoria, mostly to go to Queensland. Former mayor in my area Scott Upston, an amazing man dedicated to the youth in Benalla, ran a gym. He could not take it anymore. He left our community, and he has gone to New South Wales to escape this government and its decisions.

Victoria is the second worst anywhere in the nation for business confidence. Across regional Victoria severe labour shortages are crippling—absolutely crippling—our businesses, and meanwhile this government is applying a giant new housing tax in regional Victoria where housing affordability and land availability are virtually at crisis levels. What is that going to do to help people on the public housing waiting list? What does that do to renters? It drives up costs that people can ill afford at a time when they have been belted around the head by your restrictions with COVID.

You are closing the native timber industry. And then the member for Macedon—she has disappeared from her own MPI—comes in here talking about how proud she is of agriculture. Well, last week we discovered she was slashing 145 jobs from Agriculture Victoria, on top of the 47 last year that were mainly soil researchers that were described as being surplus to requirements.

Roads and transport infrastructure—do you really want to have a debate about that? I actually put this MPI up on my Facebook page last night because I thought some regional Victorians would like to have some input. Gemma says:

Regional Vic, I don’t even think the Labor party knows it exists …

Cameron says:

Yes, congratulations on more regional potholes and ever increasing costs …

Leigh says:

Can they come out and drive some of our rural roads? Hey maybe even just the Hume. Such a failure as a freeway!

Jason says:

They are delusional, never seen the country roads and state government assets in such a bad state!
Frank says:

OMG they are deluded! Where do we start? How about my buying a return V Line ticket last Thursday as I needed to be in Melbourne, only to be left at the Euroa station with NO TRAIN.

Scott says:

Roads … there doing great.

Greg says:

… time for them to get off there backsides and have a look, but then again they don’t want to hear what country Victorians have to say.

Andrew says:

Maybe bring up the nonexistent Victorian Youth Strategy the Victorian youth sector has been missing for well over a year after extensive youth consultation in 2020 …

Doug says:

All happen in melb but not country where it got to happen, just not good enough roads very dangers to drive on pot hole every where.

Do you really want to have a discussion about roads and transport infrastructure in regional Victoria? You are crazy if you do, because if you leave the city boundaries, which most of you never do, you will discover that roads across regional Victoria are falling apart. Our national freeway—

Ms Green: On a point of order, Speaker, I need some respite from the rant. Could you please, on the point of order, ask the member for Euroa to please refer her remarks through the Chair. She is just really being disrespectful to the Chair.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have asked the member to just refer her comments through the Chair.

Ms Ryan: Speaker, our national freeway, the Hume Freeway, is falling apart. There are ‘Rough surface’ signs and speed restrictions right across it, and you will find that anywhere you go across regional Victoria. If the Labor Party members actually left the city, they would realise the horrific state of regional roads. You have—they have, Speaker, the Labor Party have—cut the road asset maintenance budget by 25 per cent just last year. We have got critical infrastructure like the Kilmore bypass in my area, which we started on back in 2014. They have done nothing in the last eight years, absolutely nothing. We have got the Shepparton bypass. The federal government committed $208 million in April 2019 to the first stage of that project, and the state Labor government could not cough up the 20 per cent required of them to make a project that has been waiting for decades to happen. Where are they on that remaining 20 per cent? Nowhere to be seen.

They are so out of touch. Most of the regional rail work that is being done at the moment is funded by the federal government. All the state government has to do is manage it. Now, we had a situation recently where the upgrades on the Shepparton line were occurring. They scheduled them right in the middle of grain harvest, cutting off access to the GrainCorp silos, and when local farmers pointed it out, they asked them to ‘shift the grain harvest’. That is how much they understand country Victoria. You might as well hold back the tide. They wanted them to just ‘shift the grain harvest’. Are you kidding? This stuff could not be made up. It is bizarre.

Tourism and major events—what tourism? What major events? They have all been cancelled in the last two years. People are scared to schedule an event because they do not want it to get cancelled, because they risk losing thousands of dollars.

Now, education—the member for Macedon says that there are more schools in Victoria than anywhere else. Newsflash: you are the only state in Australia that has decreased the number of secondary schools—of any state or territory. It is written in the Productivity Commission’s report if you do not believe me. You are doing things like amalgamating schools in Shepparton, stripping that community
of any choice whatsoever, and you think you are investing in education. We have the lowest state funding per student in Australia of any state or territory.

Ms Spence: On a point of order, Speaker, I am sorry to do it, but I am afraid the member for Euroa is not a quick learner. Again, can you please ask her to direct her comments through the Chair?

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold my previous point of order.

Ms Ryan: Speaker, I am happy to refer to the Labor Party to remind everyone that this is their record. Labor is giving lower state funding per student in government schools than anywhere else in Australia. Mental health in students: there are 20 000 more young people in Victoria accessing Medicare for mental health services as a consequence of the lockdowns we have been through, and the Andrews government at every turn has opposed the measures that we have called for, which would deliver mental health practitioners in every school. We have more than 80 000 Victorians on the public health waiting list.

I very quickly want to go to ambulances. The member for Buninyong might spit her coffee over these statistics. Statewide the average response time when we left office, when they decried the performance, was 13 minutes and 24 seconds for code 1. Today it is 15 minutes and 11 seconds, and the ambulances are responding to less than half of the call-outs they were responding to when we left government. You are responding to fewer people in a much, much greater length of time. Spit your coffee over that. That is the record of those opposite. You think you are delivering a fantastic outcome for regional Victoria in ambulance services. The statistics say otherwise. The statistics say something else about public hospital waiting lists. I have story after story from my electorate of people who are suffering under the Labor Party.

Ms Crugnale: I am here really just to rattle off a very elongated list of things that are happening in my electorate of Bass, which we may remember had been a Liberal seat since its formation, and investment had been well to one side. The term that comes up a lot with my constituents is how neglected the seat of Bass was and that it was taken for granted. Investment inertia is another term that would come up time and time again. I will just start by saying that since 2015 we have invested almost $30 billion in rural and regional Victoria. That is four times more than the Liberal-Nationals government.

I am really proud that we are investing in Bass and the surrounding areas, and not just a minute ago but in the previous term as well. It just did not pop up as a series of commitments during the lead-up to the election but years prior saw a very visible presence. I was on council at the time of our upper house MPs working their guts out and highlighting the need for capital and social investment, the delivery of myriad projects across the portfolio sectors and also the beginnings of larger scale infrastructure programs. I do remember actually that it was not an election commitment—although the Liberals did put it up as an election commitment—but we had already funded it—but there was the $115 million investment in our Wonthaggi Hospital, Bass Coast Health, which was a $115 million expansion, which is massive. It is massive for our area. It now has subregional status, and it is powering ahead. In fact we are looking for the building to be commissioned in August–September this year. This new expansion will see us with a new emergency department (ED), 18 additional treatment beds, three new theatres and 32 new inpatient wards, which will be able to treat 26 000 emergency patients every year. We know with the growth in our region and how busy it does get over summer that it is something that is needed as well.

We have also been through our Regional Health Infrastructure Fund, which is one of my favourites. Armitage House is a cherished place where subacute care is provided at Wonthaggi Hospital. They got a $2.5 million upgrade. That was opened recently, and fortunately it was very timely too as it did become our alternate ED when we were doing the works on the car park for the new expansion. The Regional Health Infrastructure Fund was loaded up with a further $20 million in the last budget, which means Kooweerup Regional Health Service and Bass Coast Health can put up more projects. We have
already seen, as I said, Armitage House, Griffiths Point Lodge, operating equipment, air conditioners, firefighting equipment and so much more. I absolutely love this fund. We have also got a new Wonthaggi medium-acuity transport service, or MATS, one of seven new regional teams, and a new $27 million package kicked off in January to deliver more dental check-ups and treatments.

But not only is there the expansion of the hospital and the subregional facility that we are building—we have got an amazing team down at Bass Coast Health—but we are also delivering community hospitals. There are 10 around the state, but I am very fortunate to have the one on Phillip Island, which is one of 10 and one that is already providing urgent care and sees about 20,000 people a year. It is a 24-hour service, seven days a week. We are set to start construction midyear and are on schedule to complete it in 2024.

In the mental health space we have got mental health professionals in all our state high schools. Our youth can benefit from the new youth prevention and recovery care centre being built in Traralgon as part of our government’s $141 million commitment to better mental health for young Victorians in last year’s budget, part of our government’s commitment to implement all the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. So as I said, we have got mental health professionals in our high schools. Our primary schools in Bass Coast will have mental health supports available from mid this year, and my Casey-Cardinia community will from next year as well. This means extra graduate places, training programs, free TAFE and expanding our lived experience workforce, and it is also supporting 3000 new jobs. Also, just to mention our community hospitals, Pakenham, Cranbourne and Phillip Island will have an expansion of services to include mental health, alcohol and other drugs, family safety and crisis support.

I might flip to education, because I know the member for Euroa was talking about a decrease in schools. Well, that did not quite happen in Bass. We had three new schools open on the one day. There was a primary school in Clyde, a secondary school in Clyde and also the San Remo junior campus, which already has over 400 students. This $50 million project is quite phenomenal. It has also employed 32 new staff, and it means the kids from the waterline right through to Phillip Island can actually have a great local government high school close to home. It is on the back of the $32.7 million senior campus that was opened in 2020, so again Bass Coast College is growing. We have got great students, great teachers and great facilities happening there.

But it is not just new builds with our schools, we are doing a lot in that upgrade space as well through various programs. At Cowes we committed at the last election to a new gym that is about to open. That is over $5 million. At Lang Lang Primary we are just about to officially open their $1.5 million upgrade, and they are getting a whole new set of bathrooms as well, which is fantastic. Koo Wee Rup is getting a gym. A lot of our schools have had funding to upgrade and make their buildings fit for purpose and accessible as well.

There is a lot happening in the education space in Bass. We are also doing outside school care services, helping parents and carers to get into the workforce. At Clyde, Cowes, Newhaven and Powlett River primary schools we have got three-year-old kinder being rolled out and Smile Squads at our schools, and we are funding our local libraries to get our kids reading to support the Premiers’ Reading Challenge. I also recently officially opened the expansion of the Phillip Island Early Learning Centre with their new room, so there is a lot happening in that kinder space. That was around $700,000, and the places will be increased by 39 licensed places and nine new sessional four-year-old places. To help them transition to school, the school readiness funding will also help our youngest students at Inverloch and San Remo. So there is a lot happening in the education space.

I want to talk about—why not?—clean energy, renewables and climate-resilient new industries. We are talking about jobs. I have got so much more to talk about. We recently announced about $40 million through our Energy Innovation Fund for three big offshore wind projects in Bass Coast and South Gippsland. That is a lot of jobs. That is a lot of time to skill up a workforce as well. It is a
pathway for our young people. It is also about clean energy towards our 50 per cent renewable target by 2030.

We have also invested in our lifesaving clubs—Wonthaggi Life Saving Club and Cape Paterson Surf Life Saving Club—and all the volunteer emergency services equipment program grants that our CFAs, SESs and surf lifesaving clubs have received. I feel like I am really going to run out of time.

Oh, the Growing Suburbs Fund. Here we go. There is the Cowes cultural centre’s $20 million redevelopment, delivering an interactive multipurpose venue: $10 million through our community infrastructure loans scheme, $800 000 through our Living Libraries program and a couple of million from our Growing Suburbs Fund. It is great to see that our peri-urban councils are now part of that Growing Suburbs Fund, because we do recognise that our communities are growing and that they need the services, infrastructure and programs to support the people that are in those communities. I am literally running out of time, but I just want to say that there is a lot happening not just in Bass Coast but in the whole Gippsland region as well, from roads to rail to innovation centres to new industries. We are supporting our ag community as well. We are doing a lot in this space, and that is what we are about.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (17:01): To be honest, I could not believe my eyes when I read the Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development’s proposed matter of public importance today, which is:

That this house notes the Andrews Labor government’s continued record of delivering for regional Victorians, especially in the areas of:

1. jobs;
2. roads and transport infrastructure;
3. tourism and major events;
4. education; and
5. health.

Well, okay. I will start with roads and transport infrastructure. It is no surprise that I would start there. This is after last week, when we had the minister, who is sitting at the table today, the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, get up and talk about the great work he is doing delivering for regional Victorians on roads. That is so deluded. That would be laughable if it was not so serious. That is so out of touch.

Do you know what? I do not have to say anything because the community around me are saying so much. I am inundated with people talking about how bad our roads are, how disastrous our roads are, how big the potholes are. I requested last week for the minister to come down, and I issue the invitation once again. In fact, Minister, I beg you. I along with the truck drivers who talk to me on a daily basis, the bus drivers and the local community members who drive the school buses, who are terrified on some of the roads with the responsibility they have for those kids on those buses, actually beg you on their behalf. I have got truck drivers—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for South-West Coast, through the Chair.

Ms BRITNELL: Sorry, Deputy Speaker. Through the Chair, I am begging the minister to come down to south-west Victoria, take up those offers of the truck drivers and the bus drivers and experience those roads. I guarantee you will be shocked and terrified, because you are hearing something from your department—through the Chair. He is hearing that they are okay, and he is spruiking it. They are not okay. The roads are in a disastrous state, absolutely disastrous.

So I look at the $24 billion of waste that this government is responsible for on the Big Build projects, on tunnels in Melbourne, and I say: imagine what could be done in our part of the world or right across regional Victoria with that money. The Princes Highway west project is a project the federal government gave $60 million for in 2019. If this government cares about regional Victoria, why is that money still sitting in the coffers and not being used to fix the Princes Highway west now? Go and
have a look at the Illowa part of that road. It is literally cracking apart it is so bad. So the government was brought kicking and screaming to the party to actually add some money to those coffers—a measly amount, nowhere near $60 million—yet still nothing has started, and I heard from Regional Roads Victoria just recently that they do not even think they are going to start that project until at least 2023–24.

This government has no interest in regional Victoria, and the community know it. They know that when this government runs out of money, regional Victoria gets even less. So I cannot believe this government thinks it is worth spruiking the great work they are doing in regional Victoria delivering on roads and transport infrastructure. They are so out of touch, so deluded. Come and talk to the people. You will figure it out pretty quickly.

I might move on to health, but I am going to start with ambulances, because I literally just received this email. This is an email from Nicole in Portland:

> Hi Roma,
> I’m writing this while sitting in Portland hospital waiting on xray results for my boy.
> The reason I am writing to you is because this is the 2nd time in 3 months where my kid has had a pretty bad accident at school and its the 2nd time my childs school rang for ambulance to have no ambulance arrive.
> After the last accident in November my son ended up having to be transported to Warrnabool via ambulance for surgery but no ambulance showed at the school for him (the hospital staff in both Portland and Warrnabool were very mad at this due to his injury) so he had to endure an extremely rough drive to Portland hospital—there are those roads again—
> … with no pain relief, Same as today.
> After the first incident I got in contact with Ambulance Victoria and the school and each was blaming the other. This time I’ve decided to bring it straight to your attention as I want protocol’s changed so no other child has to go thru what my son has on 2 occasions in Portland

That is right now. She is sitting in accident and emergency right now with her child. This is happening all the time. I have already talked in the Parliament about ambulances not arriving. These are the sorts of things that we in regional Victoria are experiencing all the time. This government will say, ‘Oh, we’re building a hospital in Warrnambool’. Well, how hard did we beg for that? It was way past needed. It was not wanted, it was needed. It is good governance—it had to do it, that is government’s role. But now we find out that it is going to be late. It is not even started, and they are not going to be able to deliver on time in 2026. It will now be 2027.

Not only that, the waiting lists have blown out from 85 days to 218 days. Those are the waiting lists caused by this government’s mismanagement, underfunding Victorian health—which is a Productivity Commission report statement, not from me—and this has been happening since before the pandemic, that Victoria has the least funded health system anywhere in this nation. And we are starting to find out where the money is coming from for these things like our hospitals.

The social housing issue in Warrnambool is massive. We have got over 800 people on the social housing waiting list, and we have been promised $25 million. Well, that is going to build about 75 houses if you work it through, which is not going to help a list of nearly 1000. So where is that money coming from? It is coming from taxes, because you have run out of money and you are going to start all these new taxes. There was another tax announced a couple of days ago on new developments, on top of the windfall tax on the subdivided land of farmers around town. This is just going to stop any possibility of us solving the housing problem. Regional Victoria is not the focus of this government, and that is why this is so absurd.

I am going to move on to agriculture, because the Minister for Agriculture put up this matter of public importance. We have this fantastic group called the Great South Coast Food and Fibre Council, and they have been begging the minister for a measly amount of funding just for them to be sustainable. This is a group that is really innovative. It came up with an 18-point plan for water policy reform, all
about jobs growth and sustainability and prosperity in the region, which will generate $54 million per annum of additional value to the region by using water responsibly. We have that opportunity with our underground water, quite different to the Murray-Darling Basin challenges—very different. We will do it well before mistakes are made—if the government supports this. Ms Shing from the other place recommends this as a great project. She was there—this is in today’s paper—but the government will not support them, and they cut 145 jobs from agriculture just last week.

Agriculture is the industry that will recover and rebuild this state. We have got a world demand in food, and we have got a state with a food bowl with potential to grow—and this government is sitting there going, ‘We’re supporting regional Victoria’. No, you are missing opportunities. You are failing regional Victorians. You are absolutely deluded and totally, totally missing the opportunities that are there for the taking. In November, there is a big decision for—

Ms Green: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, just like the previous opposition speakers, the member is not confining her comments through the Chair and is using the pronoun ‘you’. It is disrespectful, and I ask you to draw the member’s attention to the appropriate conduct of the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for South-West Coast, through the Chair. Any reflection when you say ‘you’ or ‘your’ is a reflection on the Chair, so I ask you to refrain from that.

Ms BRITNELL: Thank you. I will. I am quite emotional about this because I am very passionate about regional Victoria and I am very passionate about the roads and the state they are in, so my apologies if disrespect has been shown. That is not my intention.

In November—I will go back to it—there is a very, very important decision, and regional Victorians will be making that decision. If there is only one thing I think they will be voting on very, very seriously, it is the fact that this government for 17 of the last 21 years has let Victorians down. Their roads are dangerous. Their kids are learning to drive on these roads. They are worried about their families. They are getting frightened to go out at night on these roads. It is so serious. The decision by this government to spruik and say they are doing a terrific job on our roads is so out of touch. Please, Minister, take up my offer. Come and sit in a truck. They will take you for a drive. They will be respectful. Please, please take up this offer. South-west Victorians and plenty of truck drivers are lining up asking me to issue this invitation. You will be shocked.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Again, member for South-West Coast, through the Chair.

Ms BRITNELL: My apologies. Through the Chair, I issue an invitation to the minister to come down to south-west Victoria and sit in one of those trucks or next to the school bus driver, and I am pretty confident that he will be shocked.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (17:11): I am delighted to rise to contribute to this matter of public importance and talk about the beautiful region of Geelong. I want to start by thanking the Minister for Regional Development and past ministers for regional development for all the work they have done for regional Victoria. It has been extraordinary. The different funds that have come through regional development have been of enormous benefit to regional Victoria.

Although the Geelong electorate makes up only a portion of the city of Geelong, the member for Lara, the member for South Barwon, the member for Bellarine and I obviously all work hard to represent our electorates. But we also work together on a regional level, because Geelong is a regional city. It is the largest regional city in Victoria, with around 270 000 people living there and a huge population increase. We have seen that over the last five to 10 years. Obviously over the last couple of years there has been a greater influx, and we are well exceeding the population estimates that we were considering a couple of years ago. The reason people want to live in regional Victoria and cities like Geelong is that they are wonderful places to live. In my electorate of Geelong they have the benefit of great schools, great health services and a great hospital. Everything is there on their doorstep. We have got
a beautiful north-facing bay. We have got the bush down the road. It is the gateway to the Great Ocean Road. People want that lifestyle, and even more so now, having gone through the global pandemic.

When we came to government in 2014 our education system in Geelong was on its knees. They were crying out for just basic funding to keep their schools going and to keep our TAFE going, so I know very well the damage that was done under the previous government. They can say all they like, but how many are over there and how many are over this side? It is because people believe in this government and what we have delivered for regional Victoria in particular. As I said, education was on its knees and our health services were failing. We saw the damage that had been done by that government at the time.

I do not have time to go through all the schools. I mean, there are 21 schools in my electorate. All have received significant funding. Similarly, my colleagues in South Barwon, Lara and Bellarine have all had huge amounts of investment into their schools. Obviously we also have invested enormously in our TAFE, the Gordon TAFE. As we speak right now they are about to finish a full refurbishment of the culinary school and the Davidson Restaurant, and the Kitjarra Centre has just opened. There are all sorts of activity going on there. Geelong is really excited. We have free TAFE. We have a TAFE now that can service our community and provide the education, training and skills that it needs. In the other electorates I know very well—and I am sure the member for South Barwon will talk about what has happened in his electorate of South Barwon—from a regional perspective the investment in schools has been unprecedented. The investment in our TAFE has been unprecedented. As I said, free TAFE has been key in my electorate. People are actually taking up the offer of free TAFE, which is enabling them to get the jobs that we are creating as a state.

With all this development we are also creating jobs and opportunities for people. Right as we speak the early parenting centre is under construction. The acute mental health service is about to open. The new regional drug and alcohol centre in Corio, which is in the member for Lara’s electorate, was opened last week. The Swanston Centre mental health service is again being redeveloped as we speak. With the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement program—youth mental health beds that we desperately need in Geelong—construction is about to happen. The upgrades in equipment to Geelong hospital, including upgrades to accident and emergency, have all been funded by this government over the last seven years. There is so much happening, and there is still so much in the pipeline. We have made commitments to build the women and children’s hospital in Geelong—that will start this year. These are things that we have done in such a short time. I know that the previous Minister for Health, the member for Altona, is sitting there, and we worked on this and talked about this and got it over the line.

The other big one for us is the fast rail and the Waurn Ponds to South Geelong rail duplication. It is a major investment; it is really significant for us. Not only is it providing jobs, but it is also providing a reliable and faster rail service for Geelong, for commuters, for people that want to travel through our city and on to Melbourne—wherever they want to go—and of course to the airport as well. These are infrastructure projects that Geelong has needed for a very long time. I know when I first started talking about the commitment by this government, people were saying, ‘Well, we were promised that by the last government and never saw anything’. We are actually delivering; we have actually started that work. The great thing about the Waurn Ponds–South Geelong duplication is that it will also improve that area and remove the level crossing at South Geelong, which is the bane of everybody’s existence in that particular area. It will make a huge difference to that environment. So we are really excited about that one.

With the huge infrastructure program that we have across Geelong what we are seeing is cranes across the sky, which is something that we want to see in Geelong. It is something that we have been waiting for to happen, and it has certainly happened over the last seven years. The cranes in the sky are not just government infrastructure; it is the private sector as well. The private sector have trust in what is happening in regional Geelong. And I say ‘regional Geelong’ because the Leader of the Opposition has been reported in our local media as saying that Geelong should become part of Melbourne, and I can tell you the reaction from the people of Geelong was pretty fierce. They do not want to become
part of Melbourne, and I cannot see how they would become part of Melbourne. For the opposition leader to walk into Geelong and say, ‘This is what we’re going to do’—I mean, what does he know about the Geelong community? They have not had representation there for the last four years. These are the sorts of things that are really concerning my community—that the opposition can go in there and make those comments when we supported our businesses in Geelong during this global pandemic, which impacted on all of them. When the opposition leader was asked what he would do similar to the Andrews government, he said, ‘Nothing, because business should not rely on the teat of government’. Now, he said that to local businesses in my community, so he has no respect for what they have been through and no respect in terms of supporting them going forward if they happen to win government. So these are serious issues of concern for my community. The opposition can wander down to Geelong and say all those things. I am happy for them to say them, because my community are outraged that they would even consider those sorts of options.

The growth in my community is enormous, and the tourism opportunities we have. We have got the amazing Kardinia Park stadium, Geelong. The Foo Fighters are going to be there—

A member interjected.

Ms COUZENS: In March, yes, the Foo Fighters.

Ms Hennessy: The Meanies.

Ms COUZENS: The Meanies, yes. Nitro—it is all happening down in Geelong. We are really excited about these opportunities, and what it is doing is enabling people to enjoy that entertainment but also bringing people into our community. It is bringing people in to spend money. The arts centre redevelopment—the Ryrie Street side is already done. We are now doing the Little Malop Street side—a $140 million development that is absolutely extraordinary, and the community are so excited. I have run out of time.

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:21): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the matter of public importance (MPI) in the name of the member for Macedon. Only Labor can call Macedon regional. It starts 48 kilometres from where we stand here. I reckon she will be calling herself a metro member as we get closer to November. It is hardly regional.

Can I say in soccer terms this MPI has got to be the greatest own goal ever kicked by the Andrews Labor government for Melbourne since coming to power in 2014. The arrogance of them parading around gloating and boasting about the neglect, the abandonment and the complete disregard by this government for the regions is completely breathtaking. Whoever thought this MPI up should have a serious look at their job role. Maybe they should consider working as the CEO of V/Line because their skill set might be used better there, because no government in Victoria’s history has turned its back on regional Victoria like the Andrews government for Melbourne have, and they wear that as a badge of honour. Investment in Melbourne, the Big Build in Melbourne—and that is ‘build’ with a D, not just ‘big bill in Melbourne’; the Big Build they call it—and the removal of level crossings, all in Melbourne.

Then they try to roll out this rubbish of their record in the regions. We all know it is aimed at the Melbourne market. Come to regional Victoria. Come to Wangaratta, Seymour, Swan Hill, Bannockburn or Horsham and talk to those communities about what they think about the government for Melbourne, and they will tell you in no uncertain terms that they have been ignored. That is the way they feel about the Andrews government for Melbourne.

The MPI talks about jobs. Are they talking about the jobs that have been lost through the vaccination mandates? The Alpine Truss centre in Wangaratta, King Valley wineries and Burder Industries in Wangaratta call me weekly begging for the vaccination mandates to be scrapped because they are having trouble finding staff. Or are they talking about the jobs at the dairy giant Saputo, one of the world’s top 10 dairy producers and Australia’s largest dairy processor, which recently laid off staff in
Gippsland and Cobram on the cheese line. Where have the Andrews government been on this? Silent, sitting on their hands, wearing hard hats and touring the tunnels around the CBD of Melbourne.

They talk about roads and infrastructure. What an insult—cutting $200 million out of the roads budget, scrapping the country roads and bridges program. And on top of that we watch our roads crumble—our potholes get bigger, edges break away—and our speed limits are now being reduced in country Victoria. I know with the bushfire recovery down in Gippsland there is a bridge, the Thurra bridge. It is going to be four years since the fires when that bridge finally gets built—and that is their timetable, not ours. So do not tell us that they are looking after regional Victoria. Of course do not expect a new build or a new road upgrade because that is simply not going to happen. The Whitfield road from Wangaratta out to King Valley—the government love to talk up the wine regions, you know, the King Valley and how great these wine regions are, but they refuse to invest in safer roads, and all the while they are spending their money, tens of millions of dollars, on wire rope barriers, which are cheese cutters for our motorcyclists.

Then they have got the gall to talk about tourism and major events. The member for Macedon must be embarrassed about what has happened in regional Victoria. Over the last two years we have been closed for business. The government’s spin is, ‘It’s all about COVID’. Well, yes, there was a lot of COVID in Melbourne. We know about that, and we know about the 801 people that died because of the mismanagement, and we can never forget that. But many of our rural communities were COVID free. Some municipalities had no cases or very few cases, single-digit numbers, but because the Premier could not stop people exiting Melbourne, could not stop them coming through the ring of steel—or, as we call it, the ring of marshmallow—the easy fix was just to shut the regions down. So you shut the regions down, all in the hope that you could keep Melbourne people in Melbourne. Over the last two years regional Victoria was closed, and quite often for no good reason. The Wangaratta jazz festival—gone. The Echuca riverboat festival, the Port Fairy festival—all these festivals disappeared over the last couple of years because we were closed for business. And our communities rely on each other. We depend on each other, and you stopped us from helping each other.

And of course if you live in a border community, well, the government from Melbourne created a monster, a nightmare that would not go away. It does not go away for our schoolkids, our health workers and everyone else who lives in a border community. So the member for Macedon should not dare stand in this place and try to tell us that they have supported regional Victoria, because they shut us down and they shut us down unnecessarily. I hope that the Labor MPs pay a heavy price at the ballot box in November.

There is also education in this MPI. The old saying goes, ‘Don’t listen to what Labor say, look at what they do’. The registration plates in Victoria say ‘the Education State’. Well, it is not the Education State. There is hardly any money spent in the Ovens Valley, I can tell you. I mean, there might be plenty of money spent on education in Melbourne, and if you believe the budget, the 2021–22 budget, $1.6 billion is going to get spent on new schools. Well, my maths says $1.6 billion divided by 88 seats is $18 million a seat. I can tell you what, I will not be getting $18 million in the Ovens Valley. I will not even be getting half of that—maybe 10 per cent to patch up a few walls and a few holes in some of our schools. But they are certainly not spending it in regional seats. Yarrawonga, the fastest growing town in regional Victoria, has been waiting, waiting, waiting for the final stage, the third stage, of their P–12. I secured nearly $8 million in 2013–14 to build stage 2, but since Labor has come to power there has been absolutely doughnuts—zero.

The people in the Ovens Valley laugh when they hear the Andrews government for Melbourne spruiking about education investment. And when they do invest in schools in regional Victoria it is things like the Shepparton super-school, the school that nobody wants. It is an experiment, a social experiment by the government for Melbourne pushed upon the good people of Shepparton. And if you want proof of that, of the government’s popularity in the regions, you will see the Premier just snuck into Shepparton recently, made the announcement and snuck out again before anybody knew he was

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there, before anyone could protest against him. And you guessed it right, it is all about the nightly news grabs for the Melbourne nightly news cycle audience.

Now, health—do not get me started on health, because we all know we are in the midst of a health crisis. Ambulance wait times have absolutely blown out. Elective surgery has absolutely blown out. And try to get a doctor in regional Victoria. If you move to regional Victoria, all the doctors are full and they will not take new patients, so we have got shortages throughout the country regions. We have got towns like Cobram—it is a beautiful country town on the mighty Murray River that needs a significant investment in its hospital. We do not even have dialysis chairs. We need that investment. We get this piecemeal approach in towns like Cobram. We get a carrot thrown here and a carrot thrown there, but it needs a significant investment. It needs $30 million as an investment. Now, that is not even a drop in the bucket of what gets wasted on some of these projects in Melbourne. I have been calling for it for years, and it just falls on deaf ears. So do not stand in this place and slap yourself on the back to say regional Victoria has been the winner for the Andrews Labor government. It is a disgrace.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Ovens Valley not to use that reflection on the Chair. ‘You’ is not acceptable.

Mr McCURDY: My apologies, Deputy Speaker. It really is a disgrace. It is a slap in the face to regional Victoria. Yarrawonga Health also needs investment, and so does Bright. Our smaller communities need that investment. They have been left out in the cold for years. They are desperate for aged care, they are desperate for high-care needs to service locals and visitors.

I look at the Albury Wodonga Health partnership, a partnership which the Premier signed off on himself in 2009, and Victoria is still not coming to the party. New South Wales has invested $75 million in this partnership and Victoria just $6 million, when 47 per cent of the patients who use this health service on the Albury-Wodonga border are Victorians.

The Andrews Labor government for Melbourne need to admit that their record in regional Victoria is absolutely appalling. We deserve our fair share, and we expect our fair share. Our roads are dangerous, our health system is failing, and I cannot wait to see this government removed.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (17:30): I must say that may have been the most boring speech that I have actually ever heard in this chamber. It was incredibly flat.

Nevertheless, today I am here to speak with absolute pleasure on the record investment that the Andrews Labor government has been making in this state. But I must say in reflecting on this particular matter of public importance, I think it is actually worth reflecting on the last, really, 30 years of investment made by various governments in this place to drive Victoria forward. I must say in reflecting on this particular matter of public importance, I think it is actually worth reflecting on the last, really, 30 years of investment made by various governments in this place to drive Victoria forward. I must say I very much wish to start with the Cain government. The Cain government made some remarkable reforms in this state. They very much started that reform, that changing narrative, that has been so critical and so important for driving investment in this state. I must say I very much wish to start with the Cain government. The Cain government made some remarkable reforms in this state. They very much started that reform, that changing narrative, that has been so critical and so important for driving investment in this state. I must say I very much wish to start with the Cain government. The Cain government made some remarkable reforms in this state. They very much started that reform, that changing narrative, that has been so critical and so important for driving investment in this state. I must say I very much wish to start with the Cain government. The Cain government made some remarkable reforms in this state. They very much started that reform, that changing narrative, that has been so critical and so important for driving investment in this state. I must say I very much wish to start with the Cain government. The Cain government made some remarkable reforms in this state.

Then I wish to reflect on the 1990s, when I was at secondary school. I can recall in that period we had Jeff Kennett as the Premier of Victoria, and we had the now opposition leader, I believe, as his chief of staff. I must say at that period of government in Victoria, Victoria very, very much went backwards. The Kennett government very much took the meat axe to our very important V/Line system in this state. They of course closed the Maryborough train line. They closed the Ararat line. They closed the Maryborough line, and they started that process of privatisation and defunding our important public transport system, which is of course so important to every single Victorian.

Not only did they do that, they then went after our public education system, and they closed literally hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of schools across Victoria. Again, they made it that much harder
for young people, particularly from the outer suburbs, from our regions and from rural Victoria, to be able to access a quality education in this state.

And of course after two terms the Kennett government was booted from office, and they turned to Steve Bracks and a fantastic Labor government, who went about building and rebuilding the relationship that this Parliament and of course Labor had with those regional and rural communities and very much started to reinvest in our regions. Of course John Brumby particularly was very, very passionate about the central role that our regions and our rural communities play in the lifeblood of this state. I very much want to acknowledge him as the Treasurer, Minister for State and Regional Development and Minister for Regional and Rural Development. I got to know him in those portfolio capacities as a previous federal MP and then later on got to work with him indeed as the Premier of this state and very much looked forward to him visiting the Geelong region and looked forward to working with him and what he was delivering for this state.

That period was a remarkable period in the state of Victoria. Huge investments were again made in our health system, in our hospital system and indeed back into our rail networks that rural people, that regional people, particularly rely upon. Then unfortunately, as all things happen, we saw the election of the Baillieu government, and unfortunately the first thing they did—the very first thing they did—was that they went after our fantastic TAFE system. They started that journey of making it that much harder for the state of Victoria and people living in Victoria to get the skills that they need for a growing and changing Victoria. They went after TAFE, and that of course meant that our young people through that period were denied that opportunity.

When I reflect on my great region, the Geelong region, all government investment effectively dried up in our region. We did not have any investment of any great note into our schools. We had cuts to our TAFE system, and of course our Geelong paramedics, our Geelong firefighters, were under siege by a government that did not want to invest in their services that they were so passionate about. The government did not want to recognise their skills and did not want to pay those particular men and women who help keep us safe in our communities every single day. Again, after four years we of course made our way back to government under the leadership of Daniel Andrews and we started our profound journey of investment in this state. That investment is creating real jobs today, it has been creating jobs every single day since 2014, and of course it is opening up our society, opening up our economy and meaning that our place, our state, will be that much greater a place to live.

I think that is the reality—that when Labor is in government we make those investments into our people, into our communities and into this state. On the other hand, when the coalition are in government all they ever do is cut, cut, cut at every single opportunity. It does not matter whether it is a hospital or the TAFE system or our road system or our public rail system, at every single opportunity when they are given that great gift of government they go after our state. They make those cuts, and that is what happens every single time. In about 280-odd days time the Victorian community will have that choice again. Do they want to continue to vote for and support a government that invests in them, that invests in their community and that invests in this state, or do they want to support the Liberal-National coalition, who will make cuts to our health system, make cuts to our road system, make cuts to our rail system and offshore the manufacturing capacity that our state has built up with our trains and our trams? Because I have no doubt that if Matthew Guy is given the opportunity—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I just remind you to call members by their correct titles.

**Mr CHEESEMAN:** Thank you. I have no doubt that if the Liberal-National parties are given that great gift of government they will immediately start undermining the productive capacity of this state. They will immediately start to make big cuts to the investments that we have put in place. That is what they stand for. On the other hand, whenever Labor are given that great gift of government we make those investments—we make those investments in our hospital system, in our rail system, in our road system.
We believe in a state that builds stuff. We believe in a state that manufactures stuff. We put our money on the table every single budget to make those profound differences for this state because we believe in our people. We believe in this great state. We believe that Victoria will continue to play an important role as the engine room of the Australian economy under the stewardship of Daniel Andrews—a person who believes to his core in the importance of investing in our communities and in our people. I commend the member for Macedon for this MPI. I think it is the right question to put to this Parliament.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Gembrook. Can I remind members to call other members by their correct titles?

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (17:40): The member for South Barwon said it exactly right. People will have a choice at the end of this year. That choice is a government who have brought a matter of public importance that is equivalent to a kinder student turning around and going, ‘1, 2, 3, well done me’, and that is not what Victoria needs at the moment. What they should have had is an MPI coming into this place, and it could have been moved by the Andrews Labor government Premier, which says, ‘That this house notes the Andrews Labor government’s failure to deliver vital services to Victorians when needed, especially in the areas of ambulance response, road maintenance, hospitality and events, 000 response and our entire health system’. There is a minimum expectation that people expect in our community the entire way across Victoria. It does not matter where you live; there are some things that you just expect a government to deliver.

We can go through the ambulance crisis that is hitting our state. No member in this place can turn around and say that the ambulance system is running well, and it is because of underinvestment since the Andrews Labor government came to power. If you come out into the Casey and Cardinia corridor and look at what is happening in that area, we are seeing response times—which are supposed to be at 85 per cent for code 1 incidents within the time frame required—at 53 and 63 per cent in Casey and Cardinia. They are actually results that have been reflective. Cardinia in 2107–18 was 62.7 per cent. There was no COVID crisis in 2017–18. In 2019–20 it was at 71.3 per cent. There was no COVID crisis in those periods of time. For this government to continuously blame COVID for the issues that are happening in the ambulance sector and the ambulance service is an absolute joke. You do not have to trust us—that is fine—but we can read some of the comments, like:

What we’re seeing is the resources are so thin, that our MICA paramedics, which should be reserved for the highest acuity cases—they’re just being sent to patients with back pain, intoxicated patients, patients who are vomiting …

That’s not what they’re there for.

A patient’s outcome will be poor if MICA paramedics don’t attend.

That is Danny from the ambulance union, who has come out publicly, and he condemns the government for the way they are delivering the ambulance sector.

In regional Victoria, according to latest figures from Ambulance Victoria in the Weekly Times, just 66.5 per cent of critically ill patients statewide in the October to December quarter were treated by paramedics within the 15 minutes after phoning for help—the lowest percentage since Ambulance Victoria began reporting metrics in 2015. Patients in Towong, Mansfield, Buloke and Loddon waited an average of 25 minutes longer for help, and that is simply not good enough.

Then the government want to brag about roads, and I know the member for South-West Coast went on about roads. Let us have a look at the government’s record on roads, because there was an inquiry done into VicRoads’s management of country roads and an interim report. The chair’s foreword, a Labor chair’s foreword, states:

It is clear that across the community there are growing concerns about the quality of Victorian roads, particularly those in rural and regional parts of the State … with the inquiry receiving over 330 submissions, this is clearly a topical issue for local communities, and individuals travelling in and around country Victoria.
That was in July 2018, and the recommendation from that committee, a committee with Labor as the majority, was:

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Victorian government refer the Inquiry into VicRoads’ management of country roads to the appropriate committee in the 59th Parliament of Victoria for consideration and report.

Then we got into the 59th Parliament, and they abolished that committee. Why? Because they do not want to know what is going on with country roads. When you look at country roads and you look at roads like down in Koo Wee Rup where they are doing the Koo Wee Rup bypass and the funding that was allocated, the government bragged about it and was on the front page of the local Gazette saying, ‘We’re going to deliver this road, we’ve signed the contracts for Koo Wee Rup Road’. And then they ended those contracts. Three people died. Injuries have happened down there. More accidents have continued. They slowed the speed down. And now they expect people to believe them. They are coming out and investing in that road now. It happens to be on the eve of another election. How can you trust them to deliver what they did not deliver in 2018 to 2022 when they are coming out and trying to mislead the community down there again?

They do talk about hospitality and events out in local communities and particularly through regional Victoria, and I find it abhorrent that they are in here talking about events and hospitality through our communities, which are struggling every step of the way because of the closing down of our regional towns and our regional cities when we had issues in some parts of the city. Rather than taking up the Liberals’ position of ‘We should be doing it by postcode, we should be locking people down in areas as required at the time’, no, they wanted to lock the entire state down. Because someone in Melbourne had COVID at the time, they wanted to lock down Mildura. How was that fair? How was that supporting regional Victoria?

And then we know we have got the 000 response. This is a major issue throughout Victoria, and general secretary of the Victorian Ambulance Union Danny Hill says it is ‘terrifying’:

“We’ve had some really harrowing stories out there where people have been waiting 15 or 17 minutes … on hold.

“If we’re not there within a reasonable time frame from the time that someone becomes critically unwell, we’re just not able to save them.”

Mr Hill says it’s a “regular thing” for only five or six ESTA operators to be available state-wide at the moment.

“That’s not an uncommon event that you’ll have 20 calls waiting to be answered, delays of 10 to 15 minutes and there are only five or six plugged in …

That is not good enough, and what we see from that is some of the outcomes that have happened, where people have died whilst waiting. The government’s response? The Herald Sun revealed in October that former top cop Graham Ashton would head a review into ESTA’s capabilities in the wake of the reports that two people suffering cardiac arrests died after 000 calls went unanswered for 5 minutes in each case. A second review by inspector-general for emergency management Tony Pearce was announced in that week amid other shocking examples. What you cannot see in Hansard is that in this picture which I am holding here in front of me is Sheree Clausen, who passed away whilst her husband was performing CPR on her and her child was on 000 waiting for 8 minutes for someone just to answer the phone. The Premier:

... said the reviews into ESTA’s operations “are very serious matters” and would ensure that critical delays didn’t continue. “We are committed to that process and making whatever changes need to be made …

That was in December. Then in January down in Phillip Island we saw the unfortunate circumstances where another person died, and the Premier has continued to blame the pandemic for the overrun in the emergency services when there is so much evidence that that is not the case. In the wake of the tragic death of Stewart Grant, Mr Grant’s grieving wife told of the horror of watching her husband die after he waited 40 minutes for an ambulance—40 minutes in Phillip Island for an ambulance. Her words to him as he left this world were:
I’m sorry, they’re not coming

They are the haunting final words of a grieving wife, of someone who was desperate, who was waiting for an ambulance to come to assist her husband. That is simply not good enough. His daughter, Lisa Hennessy, went on to say:

We feel abandoned. The government is incompetent. They’ve had two years during the pandemic to hire additional ambulance and health workers, but the situation is only getting worse and the hospitals are banked up.

In a letter to Ms Hennessy Ambulance Victoria said it was clear the organisation did not meet the expectations on this occasion:

It said: “Due to the information the call taker received regarding your father’s condition, the call was coded for a response within 30 minutes. Your mother was advised to call triple-0 back if your father’s condition changed.

He died. He died waiting, and that is what we expect from this government where they are playing the blame game.

We go on to our entire health system. I have major issues with the health system delaying elective surgery, and I know the member for South-West Coast understands this as well. In the past we have had up to 150 000 cases of cancer diagnosed each year, and when you stop screening you get less cancer outcomes. What we are going to see as these people come back in and get the scanning they should have been entitled to and did not get because of failures of this government is people instead of being in stage 1 and stage 2 of cancer being in stage 4 and ending up being put on end-of-life treatment. That is not how you run our health system.

Victoria does not want a government that stands up in this place and pats itself on the back about some of the infrastructure projects it is doing. What they want is the government to deliver the services that we all expect. When you call an ambulance, a bloody ambulance should arrive. When a mother or a sister or a daughter is waiting with someone and that person cannot breathe, they expect 000 to be answered, and the government have failed that every step of the way. So the last speaker that steps up here, I implore you: talk about the issues that are impacting every Victorian at the moment—that is, seeing people die in our state—because the government’s message of ‘One, two, three, well done me’ does not cut through at these people’s funerals.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (17:50): It is with great pleasure that I join this matter of public importance very well presented by the Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Agriculture at the beginning of this presentation this afternoon. It has been interesting to see the contributions from the other side. I think that the minister had her 15 minutes, and the MPI talks about the government’s record and commitment in regional Victoria in health, education, tourism, roads, transport infrastructure, regional development and jobs. I note that when the lead speaker for the opposition got up, the member for Ripon, she accused the minister of not having enough to say and not mentioning all the aspects and going into great detail on the MPI, and that is because there is just simply too much good news to tell.

The minister who presented this MPI particularly focused on jobs and agriculture—her portfolios, the regional development and agriculture portfolios—and then others have followed on from that. I thought it was very interesting that the member for Ripon, whilst criticising the minister and saying she could not go 15 minutes, which in fact she did on good news from the MPI, could not even go 15 minutes in rebuttal. She could not even go 15 minutes in rebuttal, and what I was disgusted at was that she talked down her community. She talked down to them like she has done all the way through, ever since she blew into town from the city. The first time she went for preselection the Libs would not back her. She had been done over twice in Melbourne and rode into town—

Mr Battin: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this MPI is about the supposed good work of the Victorian Labor government, not about preselections of current members or former members of this place, and I ask you to give guidance to the member for Yan Yean that to assist the house it would be
actually better for her to direct her contribution to the good work of the government, and if she has got nothing to say on that, she should not make a submission.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Gembrook. The member for Yan Yean may rebut comments made by the member for Ripon.

**Ms GREEN:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Battin:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, you said ‘rebut comments’. There were no comments. There have been no comments anywhere in this government MPI or from any person of this house around preselections by parties.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Gembrook, I understand the point of order—

**Mr Battin:** If the member wants to continue on about preselections by parties, there will be another time, or they could put an MPI up that actually required that and put that in.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Gembrook, can you state your point of order succinctly, please?

**Mr Battin:** That was the point of order, and the point of order is to direct her back to what the MPI is about.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ruled on the point of order. I ask the member for Yan Yean to continue.

**Ms GREEN:** I thought it was deeply shameful that the member for Ripon tried to decry our record on employment and jobs and that she tried to say that this had in fact been delivered—she did not argue with it, but she actually said that the good record was due to the Morrison government. Well, I would inform the house that Victoria has experienced 18.3 per cent employment growth since November 2014, the highest by far of any state or territory. Our own unemployment rate is currently the lowest it has been since 2002, and our unemployment rate has fallen this month to 4.1 per cent, lower than the national average and lower than every other state or territory except for Tasmania and Western Australia. Our regional unemployment is just so low; it is better than anywhere else in this nation.

On schools, the member for Ripon insisted that the measure of schools is how many students go to university, and she rightly was proud of the students from St Arnaud Secondary College, each one of whom has successfully got a university offer. But it is typical of those opposite, who cut TAFE, who failed to invest in kindergartens and who actually cut capital funding to schools by 50 per cent on their watch. What we have done as an alternative is we have restored TAFE.

Only last Friday I was with the Minister for Higher Education in the member for South-West Coast’s electorate. The only time I disagreed with the Minister for Regional Development was when she talked about the Wodonga TAFE library. I would say the library under construction in Warrnambool is one of the most beautiful libraries in Australia. It has a view over the bay. It has been built by apprentices. It is a community library and a TAFE library that respects students. It does not say, ‘Because you don’t go to university you don’t have any value’. The fact that we have invested in TAFE means we are well positioned. There is a skills shortage due to the migration pause and due to COVID, but we are well positioned in this state, because unlike other states and unlike the Tories on this side we do not cut TAFE, we invest in it—free TAFE.

We have rolled out three-year-old kinder, and for those that say we do not care about regional Victoria, well, we rolled it out in the most disadvantaged pockets of the state—the pockets of the state that the National Party never care about and that they never go to. They are silent about early education. They are silent about schools. But we have invested in those communities.

It is the same with our Smile Squad. There has been a bit of a delay due to COVID, but the Smile Squad, which is bringing free dental care to every government school student in this state, has been
rolled out first in regional areas because there has been long-term generational disadvantage and dentists unfortunately have not gone to those areas. For a long time they have not had members that have stood up for them on this matter.

Then we go to the National Party. They started their contribution with the member for Euroa saying that the National Party had had a fight because they all wanted to speak on this MPI, but it turns out that only two of them won the fight to be able to speak on this MPI on regional Victoria; they were done over by the Libs again. But was that that same fight with the recent plan for re-election for the coalition? I am not sure whether it is actually the coalition or just the Liberal Party, because nothing has changed. You look at their latest glossy pamphlet, Rebuild Victoria—it is 44 pages long, barely mentions regional Victoria and does not mention farmers or agriculture once. Where was the member for South-West Coast when that was being discussed? Where were the members of the National Party when that was being discussed? The ghost who walks—sorry, Deputy Speaker, the member for Ovens Valley, who never speaks in this place—actually said he stands up for his communities. You know, most of the new members that came in four years ago do not even know what he looks like.

Mr Battin: Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Ms GREEN: Thank you to the member for Gembrook for bringing more members in to hear my contribution. The coalition is saying that they will keep schools open. Well, that is not what they did when they were in government. They closed schools. I was so disgusted to see the member for Murray Plains standing outside my old school, St Joseph’s College in Mildura, saying a Walsh government—you know, is that a coalition, or are they split again—would keep schools open. Well, he did not dare stand outside a government school, because he never supported schools like Donald or Charlton on his watch. This is a great MPI. The regional members of this government will stand up for regional Victoria, unlike those opposite, who never do and never will.

Bills

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (18:01): I rise to speak again in support of the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022 and to finish my contribution from earlier. As I was saying earlier, COVID is still with this, but we are now seeing hospitalisation rates fall, vaccinations rates rise and our economy reopening. None of these outcomes would be possible were it not for our strong public health system, a system in which this Labor government has continually and dramatically invested since day one.

But there have also been some lessons learned through this pandemic. As we have confronted a completely unknown set of circumstances, with the worldwide spread of an infectious and deadly disease every country, every level of government, has learned lessons. It is now critical that we take these lessons and not only continue our economic, social and physical recovery but also deliver improvements. This includes a more robust and resilient public health system—one that is more prepared than ever to protect public health and face the challenges of the future. That is what this bill does with various amendments, including to the way we collect pathology testing data so that we can better achieve an in-depth analysis of disease epidemiology profiles and patterns.

In the Northcote electorate we have a unique connection to the study and treatment of infectious diseases. The Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital was one of the most important hubs of clinical care and virology expertise in our state before it was closed by the Liberal-National Kennett government in 1996. For a little history, this hospital had its beginnings at the start of the 19th century, led by the dire
need to gain a more sophisticated understanding of conditions like syphilis, smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough and diphtheria, which were prevalent across Melbourne in the late 1800s. Tragically, children were amongst the most vulnerable to these diseases. I want to read out a poem which was actually used in the campaign to establish the hospital in Fairfield, where they wanted a fever hospital. The words underscore the trauma of these types of diseases for children, and they read:

Babies distraught and delirious with pain,
Asking in whispers, for just a cool pillow,
Asking for help—shall they ask in vain?

Finally, after years and off the back of a huge campaign—and with the help of Queen Victoria, indeed—in 1904 the Queen’s Memorial Infectious Diseases Hospital was opened at Yarra Bend in Fairfield. In the decades that followed when epidemics came in waves of diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough and meningitis, the hospital was able to treat over 500 patients every month. It also built up incredibly valuable expertise and research capacity, gaining international recognition for its work on infectious diseases and in particular HIV. By the late 1980s the hospital was planning a second and a third ward to house the growing number of HIV patients. It was known for its non-stigmatising care, in contrast to the awful homophobia and panicked judgement that so many patients experienced at the time.

Ultimately, after an immense campaign to try and save it, the fight was lost and the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital was closed in 1996 by the Kennett government. The gap that it left in our local public health services and the infrastructure for health in the inner north has been acutely felt over the last couple of years. Thankfully plans are coming together for a new $650 million institute for infectious diseases in Parkville, a project to safeguard our future, a project only Labor can and will deliver. I reflect on these historic events because I want to emphasise the importance of building capacity within our health system, which this bill goes directly to doing.

My community have warmly welcomed our government’s rapid and unprecedented investment in health and wellbeing services across the state in recent terms of government, but there is still more to do to improve our public health system, and one of the fundamental elements of our health system brought to the fore during the pandemic was our testing and pathology system as well as the critical importance of testing result data. During the height of the pandemic both the negative and positive test data became critical for immediate contact tracing as well as information about how and where this virus was spreading and its transmission patterns. This testing data helped us to save lives ultimately and protect the health of Victorians. But COVID is not the only infectious disease which impacts Victorians, and we now have an opportunity to improve the way that we test, analyse, manage and control these public health risks more effectively. This is achieved in a number of ways in this bill.

First, the bill amends and improves the notification process whereby pathology services and labs are required to notify the Department of Health of test results indicating that a person has one of 79 notifiable diseases. This change will expand the data that is collected and notified to the department, including demographic information like age, sex and postcode as well as negative results. Notification provides an early warning system to our public health system of our health risks, and it helps identify emerging trends and informs measures to control, prevent and minimise the spread of diseases. By improving the quality and scope of the data available to us we can improve our knowledge and response strategies for outbreaks of infection, and by knowing the level of testing within our community we can also nuances our public health education and awareness campaigns. Age, sex and demographic information will allow for better targeting and response in our prevention and management efforts. As is always the case when we talk about the collection of personal and health information, balancing privacy considerations is key. Where possible the data will be de-identified and aggregated.

We are also improving the way we analyse pathology samples to ensure our public health responses are as rapid and appropriate as possible. Currently only specified labs in Victoria can perform certain further testing on samples to provide greater clarity around and typing and sub-classification of diseases and
microorganisms. Many labs, therefore, already voluntarily send samples for further analysis. This bill will provide for the regulatory framework to give labs and pathology services the ability to perform further testing or transfer to another site if they are not able to do it themselves, and this will substantially improve our ability to undertake further analysis and typing of samples quickly, which means it will improve our ability to manage and control the spread of infectious diseases in our hospitals.

I am conscious of the time. There are a few other aspects of the bill I wanted to cover. I will not get to them all, but because of the history of the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital I want to comment on the removal of historic references to HIV and hepatitis C from this act. These references are stigmatising and unnecessary, and this government has consistently made it clear that stigma and discrimination against people with HIV is not acceptable. One of the very first bills that I spoke on in this Parliament was a public health and wellbeing amendment bill which addressed ongoing structural discrimination and stigma around testing. The Northcote electorate is home to a very significant LGBTI community, and the stigma associated with HIV is something which has impacted the LGBTI community in a very deep and quite harrowing way. Every Victorian deserves to receive health advice and support free from stigma and discrimination, and I for one am proud to see that work continuing in this bill and to be part of that work today. The references being removed from the act today long pre-date modern treatments. For all of the reasons I have outlined, I commend the bill to the house.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (18:10): I am absolutely delighted and incredibly honoured to have the opportunity to speak on this important bill, the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. I thank the Minister for Health for bringing this to us and for the commitment to reform not just in the health sector but as it relates—as was so perfectly articulated by the member for Northcote—to equality and inclusion, and that will be an area that I will focus on in my contribution this evening. I did listen in on the contributions from those that presented earlier today, and I am really very proud to have the opportunity to add my voice.

This bill addresses this government’s commitment to the recommendations from the Victorian Inquiry into the Labour Hire Industry and Insecure Work report of 2016 and the 2018 Small Business Regulation Review (Visitor Economy) Action Statement. The bill strengthens testing data collection and further analysis powers under the act. This responds to issues that were identified during the pandemic and the matters raised during the 2019 review of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019. It introduces several reforms. I am just going to stick to the technical nature for a moment before going to perhaps how I see this as a really important reform for the Victorian community and particularly for those who have a strong focus on inclusion. It is removing stigmatising references to HIV and hepatitis C.

This bill amends the central piece of legislation that is designed to protect the health and wellbeing of our community. Public health and wellbeing is more than the immediate response to the COVID pandemic or the global COVID pandemic, it also ensures that the infrastructure and framework around the response is robust and well resourced enough to keep our community safe, and I know that has been the focus of our government’s response to this global pandemic. This bill does that. It strengthens the public health functions and addresses issues that have been found as part of the review.

I do want to take the opportunity to acknowledge our pathology services and the union, the organisation, that represents the workers, Professionals Australia. The pathology service notification requirements for testing data that relates to a notifiable condition are at the core of this legislation as well, and we know that our pathologists have been really central to our response and to keeping our community safe. Like many people I have known many pathologists and know them as hardworking members of our community. I know that there is a great pride that many of the pathologists I know
feel about the work that they have done during these last couple of years, and the way they have responded has been exactly in line with what makes us the best of us.

This legislation is key in anticipating the negative impact that pseudoscience and health information has had on our community. It ensures that we are prepared to act on public health challenges in a proportionate and accurate way.

Time and time again the Andrews Labor government has clarified that people living with HIV and hepatitis C deserve to live a life without stigma, and that is the area of this bill that I would like to focus on. The bill will remove historical references to HIV and hepatitis C, which can exacerbate social stigma and embed structural discrimination for these conditions. It will treat HIV and hepatitis C like any other bloodborne virus or medical condition. I would like to take the time in my contribution to acknowledge the elders of the community who have been battling for reforms in this area and other areas for so long. I know that we in this government have really put our relationship with the elders of the community at very much the core of the reform in so much of our approach to health care but also across so many other areas of government, whether it is aged care or all other reforms that we approach with a really close eye to inclusion. So this bill is a step in the right direction.

I would like to pay credit to some of the organisations that have been extraordinary, and I would like to thank LiverWELL, previously the Hepatitis C Foundation of Victoria. They were very generous to me on my journey into understanding hepatitis C. I know, Acting Speaker Settle, in your earlier contribution you spoke about somebody who had recovered from hepatitis C with the new and extraordinary drugs that can now cure hepatitis C and what a difference they have made, because the previous drugs, as I think you referenced, were really onerous and really difficult for people to take. It was actually this government that really pushed for that to be made available to the community, not just to those who were wealthy enough to be able to access it. So I do want to acknowledge LiverWELL for the continuous work that they have done.

I do also thank Positive Women Victoria for their incredibly heartfelt and important legacy and work that they have done in reminding us all that these reforms are so important to the community. I pay credit to Simon Ruth, of course, and all those at Thorne Harbour Health, who have done so much for our community living with HIV. They continue to support the community with a range of services, including prevention, education, treatment and care of people living with HIV, and I am looking forward in fact to discussing the needs of my community with Mr Ruth and the community of Cranbourne in coming days.

In preparation for my contribution I was having a look at some of the information on Living Positive Victoria. I was actually really moved by the acknowledgement that Living Positive Victoria have on their website of those who have fought so hard and have passed away, and I do want to take a moment now to acknowledge in this contribution Chris Carter, Keith Harbour, Ian Goller, Ken McClelland, Peter Knight, Peter Charlton, Bill Hathaway, Les Taylor, Deborah Gillies, Frank Shinnick and Vincent Christian, people who have been fighting for so long to make sure that HIV and hepatitis C reforms and reduction of stigma are very much the focus of the care that we put into making sure that everything that we do has a focus on people who are already experiencing disadvantage.

I do want to turn the focus for a moment, though, to my own community. I did make contact with the Casey Rainbow Community, an organisation which provides support, care and community to the LGBTIQ+ community in the City of Casey and which has been really important in keeping people safe. So I asked the Casey Rainbow Community for their views on this legislation, and the Casey Rainbow Community have told me they strongly support the removal of specific references to HIV and hepatitis C from the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. Having these two diseases called out within the act while others are covered off in regulations sends a message that people with those diseases are different and must be guarded against. The act of taking these references to HIV and hepatitis C from the act and placing them within regulations is in line with the Victorian government’s efforts to reduce stigma for the LGBTIQ+ community and is a welcome step.
With your indulgence I would like to also acknowledge, as many of us are wearing a teal ribbon, that today is Teal Ribbon Day, a day to support Australians affected by ovarian cancer, honour those who we have lost and raise awareness of this deadly disease. Ovarian cancer is a significant health concern for Victorian women. Nationwide an estimated 1720 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year. This illness produces everyday symptoms like bloating and low-grade pain, and there is no early detection test or screening. As a result many women are diagnosed far too late. The Andrews Labor government are proud to support vital research on early detection and treatment of ovarian cancer and, not only that, have invested $2.4 million to increase cancer trials and teletrials for regional patients.

As well, our Victorian Cancer Plan 2020–2024 has a long-term focus on wellbeing and providing support to Victorians diagnosed with cancer, acknowledging that women diagnosed with ovarian cancer have a diverse range of needs. This is something I know Ovarian Cancer Australia has been a great champion of for 20 years, so I do want to take the opportunity to thank Ovarian Cancer Australia for their wonderful work. They provide care and support for people impacted by ovarian cancer. Their vision is to save lives and ensure no woman with ovarian cancer walks alone. I thank them very much for their great care, and I commend this bill to the house.

Ms WARD (Eltham) (18:20): Following on from the excellent contribution by the member for Cranbourne I would also like to firstly pay my acknowledgement and appreciation for the work that is undertaken by all of the support organisations helping women with ovarian cancer. It is a particularly difficult cancer for many women to endure and experience, and to have that support and to have so many people here today with their teal ribbons showing their support is really important. I also acknowledge that we have the Minister for Health in this place. I do want to thank him and his department for all of the work they have done not only for this legislation but also for our state over the last two years in how we have worked through this pandemic and kept as many people as safe as possible.

This is another important bill with our government. We know how important public health is within this state, and we are the party that embraces public health. We are the party that puts money into our hospitals, the money that supports our nurses. We have introduced the nurse-to-patient ratios, and we know some other states would be well set to follow our example.

If people do not have their health, then they do not have much else. In order to put in the steps and the framework necessary to help people with their health our department and our minister and his staff—we all—work towards creating better legislation and legislation that embraces the needs and that works towards and talks to the needs that we have. As the member for Cranbourne was saying, taking the stigma out of HIV and AIDS is incredibly important. It is a really small part of this legislation, and it is something that people might miss or might not think is significant. But it is. I see you nodding, Acting Speaker Settle, and I know that, being a similar generation to me, you know exactly what people had to live through—as does the member for Cranbourne—during the 1980s and early 90s, of that stigma that came with people who contracted AIDS. There was homophobia in those attacks, but there was also misogyny, there was also classism. There were many layers of bigotry that came with the way that people treated those who were HIV positive.

It is terrific that we are at a point where we are batting away all of that, where we are removing that stigma and we are making that path easier. And while it might not be the same prevalent bloodborne disease that it was, it is nonetheless important to recognise that all people need to be respected within our health system and they all need to be treated equally. I know that, as a Labor government, this is something that is fundamentally important to us—that equality of opportunity for decent health care. It is why we are the party of Medicare, and it is why we are the party here in Victoria that has invested so much into our health system and our hospitals and has worked so hard towards combating COVID.

It is true that we can take our health system for granted. I am sure that there are many of us who had not really thought about how hard our nurses work, how hard our paramedics work, how hard our doctors work or how hard our cleaners work or the support staff that hospitals have. I do not think we really had much of a concept of how hard these people work and how much they need to be respected
until this pandemic hit. I know, along with all of my colleagues in this place, that we are incredibly grateful for all of that work that people have done in helping keep people alive, or if unable to do that, helping them be treated with as much respect and care as possible.

This bill covers a lot of areas and it delivers on a number of our commitments from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work and the small business regulation review action statement. We have got another piece of legislation where we are actually delivering, where we are actually doing what we said we would do, where we are following through, and this has been a consistent theme of this government since we were elected: that we will do what we say we will do, that we will make things happen—and this is exactly what we are continuing to do.

We know that lower risk prescribed accommodation can be challenging for people. We want to allow for the registration of this type of accommodation. We want to reduce the regulatory burden and costs for owners of small visitor accommodation such as bed and breakfasts, boutique guesthouses and farmstays. We know that in the current climate it is important to support these kinds of industries, to help them generate the income that they can and to do it in the best and safest way possible.

We also want to include accommodation related to labour hire arrangements within the prescribed accommodation framework ensuring that labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries are provided with accommodation that meets public health standards. The last thing we want is to see boarding houses and other accommodation that is substandard—where people do not have proper bathroom facilities, where they do not have proper kitchen facilities, where they do not have the services that they need to be able to go about their work. We want them to stay in a place that is actually safe before they go to work. We do not want a community where it is acceptable to have Dickensian boarding houses and so on that do not actually care and look out for people.

We are also going to expand testing data collection and further analysis powers to help improve our management and understanding of infectious diseases and the risk to public health. This is really important. We know in the climate that we are in exactly how important this is. I know that within this place, particularly on this side of the house, we take science very seriously, and I know that there are those opposite who have spoken about the importance of science and the importance of medicine and have spoken about their respect for these professions. I would urge those opposite to include in that respect our chief health officer and the advice that the chief health officer gives and the scientists behind him who advise him on how to manage this pandemic. I think that we cannot be in a position where we can pick and choose which scientists we choose to listen to or to show respect to. It has actually got to be trusted officials, and we have to show that respect to those people and understand and recognise the advice that they give us, which is given to us in good faith and with bodies of research and people—scientists and researchers—behind it.

I was very pleased to hear some of those opposite talk about the importance of scientists and talk about the importance of science. It is important. I would also urge those opposite to talk to their colleagues in the federal Parliament about increasing funding to the CSIRO and other agencies which have seen so much funding cut, because it is our CSIRO—I know for everyone on this side of the house at least—that gives us so much and is such an important part of our Australian scientific framework and has given us so many innovations, given us so many research opportunities. Imagine what a fully funded, a properly funded, CSIRO could have given to us. The advice, the support, the systems that they could have given to us in the last few years as we have dealt with this pandemic are unimaginable, and when you are running on the smell of an oily rag you cannot have high expectations of what can be delivered. So I do hope that that message is taken on board by those opposite that our scientists should be respected and listened to, especially those who are here for the public good, and that they go to their colleagues in Canberra and urge additional funding for our CSIRO, because they are very, very important.

Within this legislation we are also expanding the circumstances in which the chief health officer—the CHO, as many call him—can make examination and testing orders for the monitoring and control of infectious diseases, enabling a more targeted and potentially less restrictive public health response.
We need to be able to have the resources available to us—the knowledge, the expertise—to be able to make nuanced decisions, decisions that can respond to what is happening on the ground as quickly as possible in real time, and I think this legislation is a really good step towards helping to give some more opportunities to the chief health officer.

We want to introduce also a civil statutory immunity for officers undertaking public health functions under the act, bringing Victoria into line with all Australian jurisdictions that already provide personal liability protections through their respective public health legislation. I have also heard from those opposite that they have asked why we need to do this—why we need to protect the chief health officer—and so on. Again I would ask those opposite to actually respect our chief health officer and the work that he has done, the magnitude of work in keeping so many of us safe. It is for us to ensure that that respect is always there. I support the legislation.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (18:30): It is always marvellous to follow the member for Eltham, and I also express the wish that those opposite actually respect the science, respect the research and respect the foundation of evidence that the chief health officer and the Department of Health bring to our state. They are the people that have got us to where we are today, and that is with one of the lowest death rates in the world.

I am very happy to rise and speak on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. We have heard from many speakers today about what the bill does. It allows for the registration of lower risk prescribed accommodation, reducing the regulatory burden and costs for owners of small visitor accommodation such as bed and breakfasts, boutique guesthouses and farmstays, which is great news to anyone who likes to get away on the weekend, possibly like you, Acting Speaker Settle. It includes accommodation related to labour hire arrangements within the prescribed accommodation framework, ensuring the labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries are provided with accommodation that meets public health standards. That might seem like common sense, but I am assured that at the moment the regulation is not there and this bill will bring that framework up to date.

This bill also expands testing data collection and further analysis powers to help improve our management and understanding of infectious diseases and the risk to public health and expand the circumstances in which the chief health officer may make an examination and testing order for the monitoring and control of infectious diseases, enabling a more targeted and potentially less restrictive public health response, which I think again is common sense and is welcomed by everyone in the chamber. It also introduces a civil statutory immunity for officers undertaking public health functions under the act, and that brings our state into line with all Australian jurisdictions.

One important thing that this bill does, and I have heard many, including you, Acting Speaker, talk about this, is it removes the stigma, I think, associated with HIV and hepatitis C from the act and it contributes to our government’s commitment to eliminating stigma and discrimination towards people living with hepatitis C and HIV. Of course we know now that this does not need to be a death sentence for people. People actually live with these diseases. They manage these diseases, and they do quite well. When I was growing up I actually did not experience or was not exposed to anyone experiencing that kind of stigma until, I think, the movie Philadelphia with Denzel Washington and Tom Hanks, which you might remember from the 1990s. It stung me that people could be so cruel and absolutely chisel the ice off their heart. They did not want people to get well, they did not want to look after people in their community, but here we are now making sure that we do do that and there are no excuses about it.

One thing I would like to just pick up on is the absolutely fantastic member for Northcote and the site of the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital.

Ms Hall: What happened to that?

Mr EDBROOKE: Well, we have heard what happened to that. I think in 1996 it was closed unfortunately.
Ms Hall: Who closed it?

Mr EDBROOKE: I think it was Jeff Kennett from memory. Thank you for asking.

Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on being factually correct, the closure was actually based off of a Kirner government—

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Settle): I do not believe that this is a point of order.

Ms Vallence: review and that was what led to the closure.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Settle): Thank you. There is no point of order.

Mr EDBROOKE: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I will not take up the interjection—not point of order—from those opposite, but I do have a family connection with the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital which I want to tell the member for Northcote about in some detail, maybe over a wine later, but also the house today. My father came back from the air force—Vietnam and whatnot—and ended up working in the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital, and some of the funniest stories this bloke will ever tell will be there in perpetuity for our family. They all are based there because he worked with someone very famous called Lieutenant Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel. Some people might have heard of her, but Vivian Bullwinkel was an army nurse, and she was the sole survivor of the 1942 Banka Island massacre. I think she passed away in 2000.

Mr Foley: There’s a statue of her and a plaque to her in the Domain.

Mr EDBROOKE: Yes, that is right. It was basically the fall of Malaya, the Japanese invasion in 1941. Bullwinkel and her staff and a number of, I think, non-military civilians boarded a ship called the SS Vyner Brooke, I think it was, and they escaped the island. The ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft and they had to escape the ship. They ended up on Banka Island, and they were joined the next day by, in the mayhem, about 100 British soldiers. Unfortunately the group made the decision—well, not unfortunately, it was their decision—to elect to surrender to the Japanese, which led to essentially Japanese soldiers coming and killing the men and motioning these nurses to wade into the sea. These nurses, including Vivian Bullwinkel, waded into the sea. They were then machine-gunned from behind. Bullwinkel was struck by a bullet and pretended to be dead until the Japanese soldiers left. She was with a British private for 12 days before they got help, with a bullet in her back, before once again deciding to surrender so she could survive. She retired from the army after her repatriation, I guess you would say, and ended up at the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital.

I cannot quote my father directly, but apparently at the time when he was stationed there he was the only male in the hospital. I do not think Vivian Bullwinkel was one to exchange too many words about a subject that did not need it. There was no male change room; there were only female change rooms in Fairfield hospital. Apparently he came up and, you know, being a male, we are used to being looked after as we had been in the past, especially with sporting grounds and whatnot—you all know what I am talking about—and he said something like, ‘Well, where do I get changed?’ And she said something along the lines of—and I do not want to be quoted—‘Look, love, every single one of these nurses has seen them every single day; you’re nothing special, just take them off’. And from then on I think he just put a towel around himself, changed into his whites and off he went.

But he has got many a really funny story about Vivian Bullwinkel, who was an incredible person, working in that infectious disease area which she dedicated her life to in the end. She also dedicated part of her life to memorialising that Banka Island story. That was actually a story that she did not share until well after the war. I do not think they felt like they could share what happened, but she did share it well after the war. It is there for time immemorial now, and I looked it up on the Australian War Memorial site just before to make sure that it was in there.

But back to the bill: this bill absolutely brings together a community that has experienced COVID, experienced an infectious disease and the damage it can do to our community, our economy and our
health, and it has obviously really made us think about what we need to regulate into the future to make sure that we can manage events like this again. The bill is essentially expanding that test data collection which gives the chief health officer the absolute capacity to ensure that we can, with a broad brush, make sure we are looking after everyone in our community.

I am pleased to stand here today and know that that kind of spirit that comes from the Vivian Bullwinkels, that wartime kind of spirit where it is ‘We will do what we have to do to save people and to get things done’ is the spirit that is carried with Victorians right now. You can see it out in our community. I walk down the streets of Frankston doorknocking or on street corners with the A-frames. There are people that fully support the Victorian government in making whatever changes we have to do to ensure their families are safe. Indeed yesterday, just as we were hearing the Leader of the Opposition talk about children and masks, I had a person calling my office saying, ‘Just to let you know I have had to call an ambulance because my young daughter has asthma, so there’s a bit of a comorbidity, and she has been taken to hospital, could not breathe, and she has been diagnosed positive with COVID’.

So these stories are there. There is a small minority that might look at this bill and think ‘We don’t need that’. This is entirely needed, it is entirely reasonable and the people in our community back the chief health officer and they back the minister at the table, Minister for Health, to do what they do and take every precaution on behalf of our community, which includes masks, vaccinations and even lockdowns at one stage. It is entirely appropriate to commend this bill to the house, but can I just finish by thanking all the people in the department that worked towards this great piece of legislation.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (18:40): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. My contribution will not be as interesting—about Vivian Bullwinkel—as that of the member for Frankston, but I thank him for sharing that. That was a lovely story.

The core function of public health is to promote and protect the health of people and the communities in which we live, learn and work, and generally we do not think about the significance of public health until a crisis such as the pandemic that we have just experienced impacts on us. I also acknowledge that we are lucky to live in a country that has one of the best health systems in the world, even though we do have a whinge occasionally, when we compare that with other countries around the world. So I think we are pretty lucky with what we have got. Public health operates every day, 24/7, and keeps people healthy and safe. We rely on healthcare workers, nurses and paramedics. People know the importance of their health and that of their families and that they can get that 24/7 in Victoria. The global pandemic is proof of that. The support that we have had from our frontline healthcare workers has been extraordinary, and I do acknowledge the work that they have done over the last couple of years.

In Victoria the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 operates as a central piece of legislation designed to protect the health and wellbeing of our community. This bill amends the act to allow for the registration of lower risk prescribed accommodation and for reducing regulatory burden and costs for the owners of small visitor accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts, boutique guesthouses and farmstays. It includes accommodation related to labour hire arrangements within the prescribed accommodation framework, ensuring that labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries are provided with accommodation that meet public health standards. It expands the data collection and further analysis powers to help improve our management and understanding of infectious diseases and the risk to public health. It expands the circumstances in which the chief health officer may make an examination and testing order for the monitoring and control of infectious diseases, enabling a more targeted and potentially less restrictive public health response. It introduces a civil statutory immunity for officers undertaking public health functions under the act, bringing Victoria into line with all Australian jurisdictions that already provide personal liability protections through their respective public health legislation. And it removes the stigmatising references to HIV and hepatitis C from the act, contributing to the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to eliminate stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS.
I will focus on the labour hire and accommodation. It is this government that supports workers, and this bill is evidence of that. This bill is another example of the Andrews Labor government delivering its extensive package to improve the regulation of the labour hire industry, with amendments in the bill protecting the health and wellbeing of labour hire workers who support critical Victorian industries, such as fruit picking and harvesting. The labour hire industry has developed over the last 30 years to become a significant employer of Victorian workers and a major contributor to the Victorian economy.

In 2015, in response to a number of high-profile cases which exposed the exploitation of workers, in particular vulnerable and migrant workers, the then Minister for Industrial Relations announced an inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work in Victoria. In fact the minister came to Geelong and met many workers and contractors at Geelong Trades Hall to hear what they had experienced and the concerns they had about the sorts of accommodation and other experiences that they were having within the labour hire industry. That was a really interesting discussion. At the time we heard many different experiences but particularly around accommodation and what was happening in particular industries—and I will add the meat industry there—in our region and the impact that that was having on a lot of those workers. A lot of them were migrant workers who were expected to live in fairly substandard conditions.

The inquiry received 695 written submissions and heard from 221 individual witnesses over 17 days of hearings held from November 2015 to March 2016 across regional and metropolitan Victoria. I want to pay credit to the Minister for Industrial Relations at the time, because the work she was doing was really important, and it was about protecting workers and their rights. The inquiry found that in various ways labour hire workers in Victoria are treated almost like second-class workers, including through differential treatment for issues like health and safety. Through public consultation and hearings we heard many stories revealing a strong link between non-compliant labour hire agencies and workers being provided inadequate and substandard accommodation. This is particularly common in rural and regional areas, where workers often do not get a choice about whether they want to stay at the accommodation provided by labour hire operators.

The final report of the inquiry made it very clear that the Victorian regulatory framework for labour hire accommodation is failing to capture this substandard accommodation being provided through labour hire arrangements, such as overcrowded conditions and insufficient amenities. The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 provides a regulatory framework that means accommodation that is prescribed must be registered with the local council as the regulators for prescribed accommodation. However, in some instances labour hire workers are being housed in substandard accommodation through arrangements designed to avoid the regulatory framework, with many of these establishments not registered under Victorian law and unable to be regulated by local councils.

As I said, I attended the sessions at Geelong Trades Hall, but even previously when I was the president of Geelong Trades Hall Council we heard many, many stories from particularly migrant workers on the way they were being treated and the inappropriate housing. Their experiences were about not receiving receipts for the rent that they paid and large numbers of people living in one household—big numbers. They were expected to live in the same household, which created that overcrowding situation. And as to the cleanliness and condition of the properties, some of these properties were ramshackle properties that none of us or anyone else would live in, including the owners. There were major concerns about the conditions that they were being expected to live in, but they were often paying huge amounts of rent to live with a large group of other people who were paying rent, so the landlord or the labour hire company would be making huge profits exploiting those workers. They were major concerns that were raised with us not only when I was with Geelong Trades Hall Council as the president but also during the inquiry into labour hire.

To address these concerning findings the final report of the inquiry included recommendations that the act be amended to broaden the scope of ‘prescribed accommodation’ to ensure the labour hire accommodation is regulated under the public health framework. I think it is important that as a
government we respond to these issues that are being raised by workers. I am really pleased that this legislation addresses those issues.

The bill also talks about the Victorian visitor economy and the importance of small business, which provides up to 95 per cent of tourism business in our state, including in my region of Geelong. We know it is pretty tough for small business. It is a huge job keeping up with regulation, and it takes up business owners’ precious time, but particularly over the last couple of years with the global pandemic the impact on them has been even greater. Accommodation businesses are a vital part of Victoria’s visitor economy, offering guests the chance to enjoy a unique hospitality experience in the home of local residents.

These small businesses also provide local accommodation options in the regions in rural areas where hotels might not be as accessible. We know during the pandemic there were challenges faced by a lot of these small businesses, and the government support that has been provided has been absolutely crucial to them. I think it is great, the tourism support package that we recently announced. The support we have given them over the last two years has been really critical, and this bill also addresses many of the issues that have been raised by them. The consultations occurred over a period of time, people had their say, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (18:50): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in full-throated support of the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022. Having had a bit of a read through this week and particularly going through some of the finer points today, this is, as is obviously well known and well stated in this place, an omnibus bill and does have quite a number of significant changes that really continue to make sure that we are always forward thinking and looking at reforms to make the act more flexible and to keep it contemporary in a modern, growing Victoria. Of course I just acknowledge the fantastic contributions previously from the member for Geelong and many of my colleagues, and look, some of the contributions from the other side have been okay too. I am traditionally biased, as you would imagine, but it is fantastic to hear colleagues in the Andrews Labor government talking about their passion for public health, some of the pertinent points over the last couple of years when it comes to public health and how their communities have supported that and about some of the background and information as it pertains to labour hire workers in particular communities. I know the member for Clarinda earlier today spoke about some of those details, and it was very interesting hearing about them and how these reforms will support his community and more broadly the Victorian community—and support businesses—through the key reforms made by this bill.

We know that the core function of public health is to promote and protect the health of people in the communities in which we live, learn and work. Public health is really one of those phrases we have used a lot in these last two years. Wow! If I had a dollar for every time I have said ‘public health’ or ‘global pandemic’, I would never have to work again. Although I would do this job for a lot less money; it is not too bad. We are not here for money anyway, but honestly I would never have to work another day in my life. When we talk about public health and we talk about the pandemic it would be remiss of me not to mention how grateful I am—and I am sure all members in this place can put politics aside—that our communities have all really come together and done an amazing job through all of the hardship and through all of the hurdles and challenges of the last couple of years to really help as part of the government’s public health response, because part of that, importantly, is having the community onside with us and working alongside us. No response is ever perfect. We know there have been challenges along the way, and we have always owned up to them. But overall I believe we have done a very decent job.

I was on a phone call with a lady from Boronia just before. I was making some phone calls and just chatting to people about what matters most to them, whether it is health care, education, jobs—all that kind of stuff. And Denise started off by asking, ‘Are you Labor or Liberal?’ And I thought, ‘Oh, no. Here we go’. And I said, ‘I’m a member of the Andrews Labor government’—I am very proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, but as we all know in this place either you get shut down really quickly or you get the ‘Hey, good work, mate. Good work’. On this occasion it was the latter.
The next thing that came out of her mouth, without any further prompting, was, ‘I want you to say to the government how grateful I am for the last couple of years for what you did, the value that placed on life and the fact that you did everything you could to save lives and to get people vaccinated’. And I said, ‘Denise, where have you been? Two years and I’ve not met you’. It was a fantastic conversation, and she then went on to talk more broadly about how important it is to invest in mental health. And I said, ‘Mate, did you get my DL in the letterbox this week or something?’, because I was then very happy to talk to her not just about our public health response but also about the significant landmark reforms we are making in mental health, rebuilding our mental health system from the ground up—$3.8 billion. And the conversation just kept going. We ended up talking about the North East Link, so it was quite broad and wideranging, as we often refer to in this place. It was great.

When it comes to public health as well, you know, we talk about one of the best tools we have got in the toolbox, and that has been vaccinations. What an absolute miracle the vaccinations have been—the development, the speed at which they have been developed and incredibly, given some of the trials and tribulations and some of the trials earlier on in the vaccine rollout due to the supply provided, how quickly we vaccinated Victorians, particularly through our state hubs. Incredible. We have put through more through our state hubs than any other state. Correct me if I am wrong on that one, but I believe that is still the case.

Mr Foley interjected.

Mr TAYLOR: Nailed it. Thank you very much, Minister for Health, absolutely. And that is something we should be incredibly proud of. Of course GPs and pharmacies played an incredible role, and we are very grateful to them, and I am very grateful. I know we have had a number of pharmacies out at our local schools doing all that critical work. But our state hubs, all of the healthcare workers, frontline nurses, everyone involved in that—what an amazing job. We are one of the most vaccinated places in the world.

And not for one minute when we set out on this journey of vaccinating Victorians, when we said we wanted to be one of the most vaccinated places in the world, did I ever doubt that we would get there. I never doubted it for a minute. We are nearly at 94 per cent double dosed. You know, third doses are coming along really, really well. We are continuing to educate our communities to ensure that we protect our communities, provide that level of safety for them. Of course I am triple dosed and very proudly. It is a really important part of our public health response. So I want to pay particular thanks to those involved in that and of course to my community, which is even more vaccinated than the average Victorian double-dose vaccination rates—absolutely incredible.

This bill is about amending the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to strengthen the act in relation to prescribed accommodation, data collection and further analysis, and it also introduces a statutory immunity provision for the chief health officer and certain officers under the act—although in Victoria I think we just call the chief health officer Brett now, or some have referred to him as ‘the chottie’. I learned what that meant some months after. Anyway, the details of this bill: it will provide a statutory immunity for the chief health officer and certain officers exercising functions in good faith under the act, expand the definition of prescribed accommodation to include labour hire accommodation and create a lower risk prescribed accommodation framework. It also addresses constraints in the act relating to testing and data collection that have become more critical to resolve in the current pandemic environment. It does remove residual stigmatising references relating to HIV and hepatitis C; I know that is perhaps seen as one of the smaller parts of this omnibus bill, but I think it is equally significant. And hearing from the member for Melton today about his role and the great stigma that people faced back in his day that had HIV and hepatitis C and hearing from him personally and firsthand the difference that he knows it will make, I know that that is a critically important part of this bill.

The bill also expands the circumstances in which the chief health officer may make an examination and testing order and of course makes minor machinery-of-government and administrative changes to the act. I am sure they are all fantastic. And it makes consequential amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 to complement further analysis powers. So all in all, as I said at the start of
my contribution, it is really a bill that provides for a great level of reforms and makes sure that we are again always looking forward, seeing how we can make our public health response work better, collecting not just those positive test results across a range of those diseases that have been discussed here today but also that negative test data, which we have all learned a lot about during this pandemic. I commend this bill to the house and of course appreciate the opportunity to provide my support for it as well.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

**Adjournment**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**LAKE LEARMOUTH**

**Ms STALEY** (Ripon) (19:00): (6226) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Water. The action I seek is that she start, facilitate, create—whatever the word she would like to use—a study to evaluate the economic benefit of buying water and therefore creating a pipeline to then move it from where it is bought to Lake Learmonth so that Lake Learmonth can once again—

**Mr Foley:** From where?

**Ms STALEY:** Well, indeed, the Minister for Health interjects, ‘From where?’. We have the super-pipe that brings the—

**Mr Foley:** Yes.

**Ms STALEY:** But it is not used, so we could in fact run a line from there to Lake Learmonth and revitalise Lake Learmonth for great economic activity.

A member interjected.

**Ms STALEY:** Absolutely. We could have rowing. We could have water sports. We could have all sorts of things that used to happen on Lake Learmonth but no longer happen because we do not have the water flows into Lake Learmonth that we used to have. And that is of course as a result of both climate change and also others using more of the water that would be in the catchment. And so what I am calling on the government to do is initiate a study—a proper cost-benefit economic study—that takes in not just the cost of buying the water and getting it to Lake Learmonth but the benefits to the community and to the broader region of having water in Lake Learmonth all the time. Now, we know that they can no longer do it through natural run-off. There would need to be a new piece of infrastructure and some water bought. That is not cheap; that is why there needs to be a proper study to see whether that stacks up. The community are very keen and they believe that it will stack up, but let us get the study done. Let us see what the costs and benefits are of revitalising Lake Learmonth.

**CRANBOURNE EAST INDIAN AGED CARE FACILITY**

**Ms RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (19:02): (6227) My adjournment is for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, and the action I seek is for the minister to organise a briefing for the Indian community leaders in relation to the new Indian aged care facility to be built in Cranbourne. As you would be aware, Deputy Speaker, the south-east of Melbourne is home to a diverse community, many of whom were themselves born or have parents who were born in India. ABS data from as far back as 2016 has over 200,000 Victorians claiming Indian heritage, and Victoria is home to Australia’s largest Indian community. In my own community there are, conservatively, over 10,000 people with Indian heritage. Our Indian diaspora has contributed to the very fabric of our state, and I have particularly acknowledged this contribution over the past two years when the need for scientists, educators, clinicians and academics has been so integral to our great state.
The Indian community’s focus in Cranbourne on educational aspiration is a core element that has put optimism at the centre of the south-east’s cultural core. But as families age, culturally appropriate aged care is vital, so this new multimillion-dollar aged care facility that will be located on a parcel of land in Mayfield Road in Cranbourne East will offer the surrounding Indian community really tailored aged care that will be easier to access and such an important part of providing comfort to our ageing Indian population. I would like to pay credit to my colleagues the member for Bass and the member for Narre Warren South but also particularly the member for Narre Warren North, who have all been fighting so long for this facility. I look forward to the briefing.

EUROA POLICE STATION

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (19:04): (6228) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Police, and the action I am seeking is that she join me to visit the Euroa police station to inspect the inadequate facilities of our local police. Community members have actually approached me with their concerns that the station is no longer in a position to serve the community. The building, which is in Kirkland Avenue in Euroa, is small, it is old and it has no storage space, which means it is a very cluttered and very difficult environment for our local police to work in. No-one actually knows how old the building is and the council does not seem to have a record of it, but the one thing that the community does agree on is that it is no longer fit for purpose. The building is on quite a large block, so it would be possible and there is room to undertake a rebuild on the site.

At present there is no way for police to actually separate victims from perpetrators, particularly when they are interviewing people, because the station is so small and cramped, so when victims are being interviewed or they are giving statements they can often be overheard by the perpetrator, who is but a few steps away, and by other people in the building. That of course has a chilling effect, and it is very intimidating for victims of crime. It is particularly dangerous in situations of family violence or assault, but unfortunately our local police officers have very little choice because that is the environment that they are working in. Police are also really struggling to support people who are suffering from mental ill health. I know that there are parents who have taken their children to the police station because they have nowhere else to turn, and police have really struggled to support those young people in the environment that they are working in.

The station’s interview and holding room is also cramped and positioned at the station’s back door, which means that a police officer has to sit outside that door whenever someone is in that room to avoid criminals escaping out that door, which is a very poor use of time in a station that only has five police officers. The station also only has one toilet, which is shared between officers, criminals and victims, and I understand that one of the station’s officers is actually sleeping there in a locker room overnight because he has to travel. He lives an hour away from Euroa. The town’s population is growing, and if that continues then there is going to be a need for a bigger station in any case. So I really look forward to welcoming the minister to Euroa so she can see for herself why the community is pushing for a new police station in town.

BALLARAT SPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:07): (6229) I direct my adjournment matter to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and the action I seek is for him to provide me with an update on the Victorian government’s investment in major sporting infrastructure and events in Ballarat. It is well known that Victoria is Australia’s sporting and cultural capital, and it is thanks to investments made by the Andrews Labor government that regional centres like Ballarat can now offer outstanding sporting facilities capable of hosting national and international sporting events.

It was great that Ballarat hosted a number of WNBL games across January. I had the opportunity to attend a couple of these matches and was very impressed with the skills and athleticism on display by some of the best basketballers in the country as well as international imports. Having our world-class Ballarat Sports and Events Centre was a major factor in the decision by the Perth Lynx to base players and club officials in Ballarat during January.
I am pleased that regional Victoria, particularly my electorate of Wendouree, has hosted a number of other events already this year, including the AusCycling road nats and the Ballarat Pacing Cup. Our investment in Mars Stadium has contributed to Ballarat having the opportunity to host an NRL preseason match for the first time, when the Melbourne Storm take on the Newcastle Knights on 27 February. This will be the first time that Ballarat has ever hosted an NRL game, and I know local Storm fans are very excited to be seeing their favourite players in Ballarat this Sunday. We are also looking forward to welcoming the Western Bulldogs back to their second home at Mars Stadium this year for two AFL home-and-away matches.

Mr Wynne: Who are they playing?

Ms Addison: I am not sure yet. I will have to check the fixture, Minister.

Ballarat is able to host these major sporting events as a result of the important investments by the Andrews Labor government in Ballarat Sports and Events Centre, Bray Raceway and Mars Stadium.

Support for blockbuster events like the AusCycling road nats is another way the Victorian government is supporting local jobs and providing a boost for Ballarat businesses. Victoria is the home of cycling in Australia, and we are proud to host the Federation University Road National Championships in Ballarat. The five-day event features criterium, road race, gran fondo and time trial events and continues to grow in numbers each year. We are thrilled to welcome Australia’s most talented cyclists to Ballarat each year as they vie for the coveted green and gold national champions jersey. These championships showcase our beautiful city of Ballarat and Buninyong, not only to participants and spectators but even a greater audience through national and international broadcasts. The road nats provide a wonderful opportunity for Ballarat to show off our amazing sights and our great hospitality, with plenty happening on and off the track, as well as boosting the local economy. I thank the minister for his commitment to sports infrastructure in the regions, and I look forward to his response.

VICTORIAN BLUE OCEAN SAFETY SKILLS CENTRE

Mr Riordan (Polwarth) (19:10): (6230) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek from the minister is an update on the proposal that has been given to her and her department on the VBOSS centre in Apollo Bay. The VBOSS centre is the Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Skills Centre, and it is a crucial upgrade in the development of the Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club. A redeveloped surf lifesaving club is absolutely required in the Apollo Bay region at the moment, and the simple reason is that it is an old, out-of-date, no-longer-fit-for-purpose centre. This building was built quite some time ago. It is multistorey. All the facilities that people need to access are upstairs and inaccessible for anyone with a disability or any sort of mobility issues. It is on the beautiful Apollo Bay foreshore. It has been a beacon of safety along the Great Ocean Road, looking after both the Apollo Bay and Marengo beaches, and increasingly it operates to help keep the many visitors and tourists safe.

The VBOSS centre will be an Australian first. It is a centre that will hopefully provide ongoing year-round training for all lifesavers and children and school students in safety around ocean swimming. Deaths, sadly, in the last reporting period were at record levels. It was the worst fatal drowning toll since Life Saving Victoria was established back in 2002. That came at a time when we had been in a pandemic and lockdown and people were probably not even being as mobile and accessing the beach as much as they would in ordinary years, but unfortunately deaths right across the spectrum increased. But we know that with increased training, with increased safety and with increased education in this space we can save lives and keep our kids safe.

The VBOSS centre is a collaboration between emergency services and the Department of Education and Training. The education department and the school are prepared to host the accommodation component of it, which will mean that a town like Apollo Bay, which has lots of spare capacity in the middle of winter, will become an all-year-round destination, which will help protect that town and help that town recover from the devastation of the loss of tourism over the last two years. The VBOSS centre will also
give an identity to surf lifesaving in that community. It will help improve and revitalise the foreshore and, most importantly, help businesses and that community to fully recover in a really long term and sustainable way from the devastation of the last two years of lockdown and COVID.

DALTON–SETTLEMENT ROADS, THOMASTOWN

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (19:13): (6231) I raise a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it is in relation to the intersection of Dalton Road and Settlement Road in my electorate of Thomastown. The action I seek is for the minister to come to the Thomastown electorate to see this intersection for himself to appreciate how important it is to have it removed and replaced with lights. Currently the intersection is serviced by a three-lane roundabout which is infamous among locals and commuters alike. The roundabout is heavily congested at all times and is subject to road rage and regular near misses as drivers navigate this dangerous and extremely stressful roundabout. It covers three lanes with five exits and four entrances.

As the minister would appreciate, it is vital that the arterial road network in the north of Melbourne keeps up with the rate of development. This roundabout has well and truly outlived its usefulness and should be replaced with traffic lights. The roundabout is one of the busiest and congested in the area as it handles all traffic coming off and on the M80 at the Dalton Road exit and entry. Our Andrews Labor government has added extra lanes and capacity to the M80 in our area, and this can only mean more traffic using this roundabout. Signalising this intersection will build on the great work of our Andrews Labor government, which has invested in the M80, funded the duplication of Epping Road, removed other congested roundabouts at Dalton Road and Childs Road, built the O’Herns Road interchange and is now planning for the Craigieburn Road east upgrade, to name a few. The residents of Thomastown are very much looking forward to a positive answer and for the Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads and Road Safety to come to the electorate to see for himself.

NATIVE FOREST LOGGING

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:15): (6232) My adjournment tonight is to the Premier. The action I seek from the Premier is to refer the actions of VicForests, specifically the hiring of a private investigator to spy on a private citizen, to the Victorian Public Sector Commission. Late last year the Victorian public learned that VicForests had engaged a private investigator to follow and spy on a member of our community. This deeply troubling surveillance emerged alongside reports of widespread illegal logging in water catchments and on steep slopes and a failure of VicForests to meet its legal requirement to regenerate forests after logging. In December I referred VicForests to the Victorian Public Sector Commission to investigate, believing this conduct was a clear breach of the public sector code of conduct. I have since heard back from them that they require a referral from the Premier to be able to investigate, so I respectfully ask the Premier to make this referral.

The actions of VicForests are out of step with the community’s expectations of how our government bodies should operate. My office receives many calls and emails from members of the public deeply troubled by VicForests’s conduct, and this surveillance of a citizen is another example of appalling behaviour that should never have happened. VicForests is undermining the credibility of Victoria’s public sector. It is important for the Premier to step in and ensure a proper investigation of the agency and its activities. An internal investigation behind closed doors, as they say they are conducting, I believe is simply not good enough. For too long this government and previous governments have bent over backwards to facilitate logging in Victoria’s native forests, defying all reason. This is logging that actually costs the taxpayer money every year, threatens our drinking water here in Melbourne, pushes creatures like the greater glider to the brink of extinction and, as new research shows, actually makes catastrophic fires worse as well as making climate change worse.

Unfortunately we saw Labor’s capture by vested logging interests further exposed last week. Over recent years community groups have discovered illegal logging and have taken VicForests to court several times to try and stop it. But rather than actually stopping the illegal logging, which is illegal under Victorian law, what did this Labor government do? They did not decide to stop the illegal
logging; instead they decided to change the rules to make illegal logging legal. Community groups have contacted my office distraught. Their efforts to keep forests and threatened species safe through the courts are being undone by a government change in the rules to make illegal logging easier and in fact lawful.

I know that native forest logging is a difficult topic for Labor, yet the Victorian community overwhelmingly wants to see our native forests protected immediately. It is time for Labor to do the right thing, to end logging immediately and to value our forests for the incredible life-giving places that we and that so many plants and animals and wildlife depend upon.

**BONDI ROAD, BONBEACH, LEVEL CROSSING REMOVAL**

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (19:18): (6233) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to please provide my community with an update on the Bonbeach level crossing removal project. Last November I was delighted to join with my local community to celebrate the opening of the brand new Bonbeach station and of course the removal of the 50th level crossing. It was a terrific morning—so much enthusiasm for the station and new precinct. The new Bonbeach station is an amazing upgrade. It is clean, safe, accessible and modern, with views out to the bay and traffic that flows much better with the Bondi Road level crossing gone, even with the current lane closures on the Nepean Highway—and pedestrian access is so much safer, with better traffic signals and no level crossing. All of this has been delivered in an incredible time frame considering the scale and scope of this level crossing removal project and of course a COVID pandemic. I really want to thank the local community for their patience and understanding throughout the works and the workers who have done an incredible job working throughout summer to get this project done. Minister, as you know, the local and neighbouring communities wholeheartedly welcomed the new Karrum Karrum Bridge as part of the level crossing removal project in Carrum, finally connecting Station Street between Carrum and Bonbeach, which we officially opened in 2018. Can the minister please provide an update for my community on what is happening next as part of the level crossing removal project at Bonbeach.

**MOOROOLBARK–HULL ROADS INTERSECTION, MOOROOLBARK**

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:19): (6234) The action that I seek is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to advise my community if any modelling has been done on traffic flows on Mooroolbark Road and Hull Road in Mooroolbark at the Kinley development, at the old Lilydale quarry site, and based on that modelling to allocate funding in the upcoming state budget to improve the roads and widen Mooroolbark Road at the Hull Road bridge to alleviate the terrible traffic congestion that is at that intersection and on those roads today and will only get significantly worse when that development is fully materialised and there are several thousand more cars on those roads.

The Mooroolbark Road and Hull Road intersection under the railway bridge in Mooroolbark is a dangerous intersection. It is a major bottleneck for traffic congestion and accidents today, and this single-lane bottleneck will only get worse as more cars are on the road and people are needing to get to school and work and commute through the area. We know that today it is a single-lane bottleneck; only one lane of traffic can pass at any one time. So it is not even a dual carriageway; you cannot have two lanes going to and fro. As you can imagine, when you have got buses coming under that bridge and cars coming under that bridge, it is very, very congested.

If the minister can also state, as part of that modelling and explanation and advice to my community, whether it is true that his department have said that they will not make these very sensible improvements to this road because the height of the bridge is too low. Surely these Victorians that live in Mooroolbark also deserve to have safe roads to travel on and safe bridge heights—to have the government upgrade those rail bridge heights and also make sure that there is significant congestion alleviation so that people can get around their everyday, day-to-day lives safely.
We know that the Andrews Labor government has continued to ignore the members of my community through Mooroolbark. As I said, this is a traffic bottleneck today, and in a couple of years time there is estimated to be another 8000 homes. If you think about one or 1½ cars per household, that is around 6000 more cars that will be on the road in a couple of years time. I have no idea how the people of Mooroolbark will be able to get around, because the traffic bottleneck is so bad today. I would appreciate that from the minister.

**BOX HILL TRANSIT INTERCHANGE**

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (19:22): (6235) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit the Box Hill bus interchange in my electorate of Box Hill to discuss the improvements that are needed to this critical piece of Melbourne’s public transport infrastructure. The Box Hill transport interchange is one of Melbourne’s busiest transport hubs, and prior to the pandemic tens of thousands of bus, tram and rail passengers passed through Box Hill every day. The current interchange was built almost 40 years ago in conjunction with the removal of the Station Street level crossing. Box Hill’s transport interchange facilities were advanced for Melbourne at the time but would not have been designed for a life cycle far beyond the present nor for current expectations of amenity or access.

The interchange lacks connectivity and has significant accessibility challenges, particularly for commuters with a disability who wish to transfer between bus and rail services. Many residents have also relayed their frustration to me about the use of commuter car parks by those who work in Box Hill to avoid paying for a car parking space at commercial rates. This disadvantages local Box Hill residents, who are forced to use other modes of transport to access their closest railway station.

Delivering on the transport infrastructure that Victorians need now and in the future has been one of the hallmarks of the Andrews Labor government, and this is no more evident than in the Box Hill electorate, where the Eastern Freeway is being upgraded, along with the provision of a dedicated busway as part of the North East Link Program; two dangerous and congested level crossings are being removed in Mont Albert Road, Mont Albert and Union Road, Surrey Hills; and of course there is Victoria’s largest public transport infrastructure project, the Suburban Rail Loop, with stage 1 of this project running from central Box Hill to Cheltenham, with key connections to Deakin University and Monash University.

The Suburban Rail Loop will transform the way in which people in Melbourne move around our city. It will open up the jobs-rich area around the Box Hill CBD to workers from Melbourne’s southern and south-eastern suburbs and in the future the northern suburbs. For residents of the Box Hill electorate it will mean a single transfer to thousands of jobs, education and health facilities right across Melbourne. This is why the quality of that transfer is so important.

Many studies in transport planning have shown that the ease of transfer from one public transport service to another, the time taken to make the transfer and the subsequent wait time for the second service can make a big difference on the utility of the overall trip. That is why making the intermodal connections at Box Hill as seamless and convenient as possible will be critical, and the Suburban Rail Loop project provides the impetus and opportunity to reshape the connectivity of the entire Box Hill public transport precinct, including the bus interchange. I look forward to the minister being able to visit the interchange with me and discussing what improvements are needed to redevelop this busy transport interchange to better meet the needs of Box Hill residents and commuters.

**RESPONSES**

Mr WYNNE (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (19:25): The member for Ripon raised a matter for the Minister for Water seeking that the minister fund a study in relation to the buying back of water to replenish Lake Learmonth. It is an expensive ask, I must say, having—

Ms Ryan: A study; it’s not that expensive.
Mr WYNNE: Well, no. In terms of buying water back it is a very expensive thing. Anyway, we will make sure the minister is aware of that request.

The member for Cranbourne has raised a matter for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers seeking a briefing in relation to the Indian aged care facility at Cranbourne, which is a terrific project for that area. I am sure the minister will be interested to inspect that facility.

The member for Euroa has raised a matter for the Minister for Police, and I was trying to picture exactly where the police station is. I am not sure it is on the heritage register. Is it?

A member: No.

Mr WYNNE: No, it is not. She suggests that the minister visit Euroa police station and make an assessment of the facilities that are available there to the hardworking police in Euroa. I will make sure that the minister is aware of that request.

The member for Wendouree raised a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events seeking an update on the magnificent major sporting infrastructure in Ballarat, which we all know and are very proud of. And indeed if we do get the Commonwealth Games it would be obviously a major site for the games themselves.

A member: Can you fix the roads there as well?

Mr WYNNE: I will do my best. I will be out with my shovel and so forth. The member for Polwarth—

A member: That’s your next job.

Mr WYNNE: That is a possibility, you know.

A member: A post-politics job.

Mr WYNNE: What do you think, Deputy Speaker?

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I think the Minister for Planning needs to stop responding to interjections and respond to honourable members’ adjournment matters.

Mr WYNNE: I am under intense pressure here, Deputy Speaker, I assure you.

The member for Polwarth has raised actually a very important matter for the Minister for Emergency Services seeking an update on refurbishments of the Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Skills Centre at Apollo Bay and its crucial importance in relation to our lifesaving community more generally. Of course as we know and as the member indicated, we have had an appalling outcome in terms of fatal drownings over the summer. And can I say as somebody who is a boatie himself, so many of them are blokes—going out on the water, ill equipped and perhaps have had too much on board, and over they go. It is a very bad situation, and we do thank the member for raising this.

Mr Riordan: Forty per cent of them in the sea, and 60 per cent of them are men.

Mr WYNNE: Yes, 60 per cent of these drownings are men who are just not equipped, or think they are better equipped, in terms of their capacity in the water. And the clear answer is that they are not. So that is a very important adjournment matter.

The member for Thomastown has raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, seeking that the minister come to a very dangerous intersection at Dalton and Settlement roads—I know the intersection well; it is a very complex area—and arguing for the signalisation of that intersection. I know the minister will be pleased to support that visit.
The member for Melbourne has raised a matter for the Premier in relation to activities by VicForests. Her advice is that the referral to the public services commissioner of VicForests employees can only be done by the Premier. I take that as the member has advised and will make sure that the Premier is aware of that matter.

The member for Carrum has raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure seeking further advice in relation to the works in relation to Bonbeach level crossing. I do understand that the view of the Bonbeach station is something spectacular, over the water. I look forward to coming down myself to have a look at that.

The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the minister for roads, dealing with what she puts to be some very, very difficult traffic issues—

Ms Vallence interjected.

Mr WYNNE: Yes, I am coming to the modelling—looking at traffic modelling and the issue of growth at the Lilydale quarry site, which is a very, very popular residential development, as the member knows. Indeed it is scheduled for quite significant further development in the future, so I will make sure that the minister is aware of that.

Finally, the member for Box Hill raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport, seeking that the minister visit the bus interchange in Box Hill, which is an absolutely crucial interchange, not just now but, as the member actually also indicated, obviously when the Suburban Rail Loop comes to fruition in the next few years. I am sure that the minister will be very keenly looking at the opportunity to come and look at that bus interchange and how it is operating now and how it is going to operate in the future.

My work is done.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, can I just clarify with the member for Evelyn that she was referring to Mooroolbark Road?

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, Mooroolbark Road and Hull Road in Mooroolbark.

Mr WYNNE: At the Lilydale quarry site, yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister, your work is done. The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7.32 pm.