

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 6 March 2013

(Extract from book 3)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable ALEX CHERNOV, AC, QC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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Deputy Premier, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Bushfire Response, and Minister for Regional and Rural Development	The Hon. P. J. Ryan, MP
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Minister for Housing, and Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development	The Hon. W. A. Lovell, MLC
Minister for Corrections, Minister for Crime Prevention and Minister responsible for the establishment of an anti-corruption commission . . .	The Hon. A. J. McIntosh, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads	The Hon. T. W. Mulder, MP
Minister for Ports, Minister for Major Projects, Minister for Regional Cities and Minister for Racing (to 6 March)	The Hon. D. V. Napthine, MP
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Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	The Hon. E. J. Powell, MP
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Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, and Minister for Water	The Hon. P. L. Walsh, MP
Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women's Affairs and Minister for Community Services	The Hon. M. L. N. Wooldridge, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mr D. J. Hodgett, MP

Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Darveniza, Mr D. Davis, Mr P. Davis, Mr Hall, Ms Lovell, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Scheffer.

Procedure Committee — The President, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Lenders, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Viney

Legislative Council standing committees

Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee — Mr Barber, Ms Broad, Mrs Coote, #Ms Crozier, Mr Drum, Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, #Mr Leane, #Mr Lenders, #Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pulford, Mr Ramsay and Mr Somyurek.

Economy and Infrastructure References Committee — Mr Barber, Ms Broad, Mrs Coote, #Ms Crozier, Mr Drum, Mr Finn, #Mr Leane, #Mr Lenders, #Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pulford, Mr Ramsay and Mr Somyurek.

Environment and Planning Legislation Committee — Mr Elsbury, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, #Mr Leane, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Petrovich, Mrs Peulich, Mr Scheffer, #Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

Environment and Planning References Committee — Mr Elsbury, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, #Mr Leane, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Petrovich, Mrs Peulich, Mr Scheffer, #Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, #Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, Ms Mikakos, Mr O'Brien, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Petrovich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

Legal and Social Issues References Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, #Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, Ms Mikakos, Mr O'Brien, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Petrovich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

Participating member

Joint committees

Accountability and Oversight Committee — (*Council*): Mr O'Brien, Mr O'Donohue. (*Assembly*): Ms Kanis, Ms Richardson and Mr Wakeling.

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Lenders, Ms Lovell and Ms Pennicuik. (*Assembly*): Mr Clark, Ms Hennessy, Mr Holding, Mr McIntosh, Mr Merlino, Dr Naphthine and Mr Walsh.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): Mr Leane, Mr Ramsay and Mr Scheffer. (*Assembly*): Mr Battin and Mr McCurdy.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Peulich. (*Assembly*): Mr Burgess, Mr Carroll, Mr Foley and Mr Shaw.

Education and Training Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elasmr and Ms Tierney. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Ms Miller and Mr Southwick.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Council*): Mr Finn, Mr Somyurek and Mr Tarlamis. (*Assembly*): Ms Ryall and Mrs Victoria.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Council*): Mr Koch. (*Assembly*): Mr Bull, Ms Duncan, Mr Pandazopoulos and Ms Wreford.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Coote, Ms Crozier and Mr O'Brien. (*Assembly*): Ms Halfpenny, Mr McGuire and Mr Wakeling.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*) Mr Drum, Mr Eideh, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, and Mr P. Davis. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Ms Campbell, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Graley, Mr Wakeling and Mr Weller.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Committee — (*Council*): Mr Koch and Mr Viney. (*Assembly*): Ms Hennessy, Mr Newton-Brown and Mr Weller.

Law Reform Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Petrovich. (*Assembly*): Mr Carbines, Ms Garrett, Mr Newton-Brown and Mr Northe.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg and Mr Ondarchie. (*Assembly*): Ms Graley, Ms Hutchins and Ms McLeish.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Council*): Mr O'Brien, Mr Ondarchie and Mr Pakula. (*Assembly*): Mr Angus, Ms Hennessey, Mr Morris and Mr Scott.

Road Safety Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elsbury. (*Assembly*): Mr Languiller, Mr Perera, Mr Tilley and Mr Thompson.

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Council*): Mr Drum. (*Assembly*): Mr Howard, Mr Katos, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Mr O'Donohue. (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Ms Campbell, Mr Gidley, Mr Nardella, Dr Sykes and Mr Watt.

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

President: The Hon. B. N. ATKINSON

Deputy President: Mr M. VINEY

Acting Presidents: Ms Crozier, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmr, Mr Finn, Mr O'Brien, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, Mr Ramsay, Mr Tarlamis

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Deputy Leader of the Government:

The Hon. W. A. LOVELL

Leader of the Opposition:

Mr J. LENDERS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

Mr G. JENNINGS

Leader of The Nationals:

The Hon. P. R. HALL

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr D. DRUM

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Barber, Mr Gregory John	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Lenders, Mr John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Broad, Ms Candy Celeste	Northern Victoria	ALP	Lovell, Hon. Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP
Coote, Mrs Andrea	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	O'Brien, Mr David Roland Joseph	Western Victoria	Nats
Dalla-Riva, Hon. Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Darveniza, Ms Kaye Mary	Northern Victoria	ALP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Davis, Hon. David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Pakula, Hon. Martin Philip	Western Metropolitan	ALP
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Elasmr, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Elsbury, Mr Andrew Warren	Western Metropolitan	LP	Ramsay, Mr Simon	Western Victoria	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Rich-Phillips, Hon. Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
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Hall, Hon. Peter Ronald	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
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Koch, Mr David Frank	Western Victoria	LP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Kronberg, Mrs Janice Susan	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Eastern Victoria	ALP

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Wednesday, 6 March 2013

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am advised and wish to inform the house that the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee will be meeting this day, following the conclusion of the sitting of the Council.

CLASSIFICATION GUIDELINES

National code, computer games and films

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations), by leave, presented the national classification code, guidelines for the classification of computer games and guidelines for the classification of films.

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Report on Management of Unplanned Leave in Emergency Services, March 2013.

Australian Crime Commission —

Report under section 30L of the Surveillance Devices Act 1999, 2011–12.

Report under section 31 of the Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004, 2011–12.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:

Road Safety Act 1986 — No. 26.

Supreme Court Act 1986 — Civil Procedure Act 2010 — No. 27.

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 — No. 24.

Water Industry Act 1994 — No. 25.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 26 and 27.

Victoria Police — Chief Commissioner — Report under section 30L of the Surveillance Devices Act 1999, 2011–12.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Australian Intercultural Society: Noah's Ark boat cruise

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — On Thursday, 21 February, I attended a most unusual and fascinating event, the Noah's Ark boat cruise down the

Yarra River. The event was organised by the Australian Intercultural Society. The main theme of the event was celebrating Abraham's hospitality and sharing Noah's pudding. This is the third anniversary of the event. It provided an innovative way of networking for distinguished guests who represented a multitude of faiths, professions and cultures. I thank the organisers for such an enjoyable evening.

Australian Lebanese Medical Association: inaugural ball

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, on Saturday, 23 February, I attended along with parliamentary colleagues the inaugural Australian Lebanese Medical Association ball. In attendance were political and community leaders from all walks of life. I congratulate the president, Dr Walid Ahmar, and his organisers on their huge success on the night and wish the association well in its endeavour to promote harmonious relationships within the Australian-Lebanese medical community.

Darebin Community and Kite Festival

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, I attended the annual Darebin Community and Kite Festival on Saturday, 2 March, at Edwards Lake in Reservoir.

Mr Ondarchie — So did I.

Mr ELASMAR — You had left by the time I was there.

The festival was organised by the City of Darebin. I saw many families enjoying themselves as their children flew colourful kites. It was heartening to see people of all ages and nationalities participating in a wonderful community event.

Sport and recreation: Northern Victoria Region

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — The past few days have been wonderful for sports announcements in the Bendigo and Shepparton areas. Sport is so often the glue that holds a community together, and recent announcements by the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Hugh Delahunty, are welcome.

In a significant announcement more than \$1 million has been allocated to Eaglehawk's Canterbury Park to turn it into a sports hub. The new facility will have two multipurpose netball and tennis courts with lighting, along with a new pavilion and a synthetic bowling green. This fulfils an election commitment made by the

2010 Liberal candidate for Bendigo East, Michael Langdon.

The outlook is also bright for Huntly's Strauch Recreation Reserve and the Heywood Recreation Reserve with the completion of lighting upgrades. The Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve is also set for an upgrade with the announcement of \$100 000 to install new lights. It is also exciting that \$500 000 has been allocated to a new sports pavilion at Newstead Recreation Reserve, replacing a run-down facility. The money will go towards a new multipurpose sport and recreation pavilion at the ground, which is home to Newstead's football, netball, cricket and tennis clubs. The new development will feature changing rooms, storage areas, a kitchen and a multipurpose community space.

I am also thrilled with the \$750 000 commitment to the Shepparton sports precinct in my home town, which was announced on Saturday. The new Shepparton community football complex will feature four soccer pitches, including two with lighting. Another two multipurpose pitches will be marked for soccer and other sports. All in all, it is a series of positive community-building announcements from the Victorian coalition government for the vibrant Bendigo and Shepparton regions.

Frankston Hospital: funding

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I was greatly disturbed, as were many Frankston residents, to read last week that the Frankston Hospital is planning to keep a ward closed until Easter. The article revealed that despite the re-injection of \$107 million by the federal government, the Frankston Hospital would keep its ward closed. It seems extraordinary to me that the hospital would keep a ward closed once funding had been restored, unless of course there were other factors involved. I would suggest that it has more to do with the \$616 million in cuts that the Baillieu government has delivered to the health system in Victoria.

In the latest dump of hospital data we see that Frankston is failing on delivering health care to the community. Only 48 per cent of elective surgery category 2 patients were seen within 90 days, which is a long time to wait, especially when the government has over 1700 people on the elective surgery waiting list at Frankston. Only 81 per cent of elective surgery category 3 patients were seen within one year. Several weeks ago we saw lines of ambulances at Frankston Hospital waiting to unload patients. Instead of banging down the door of the Minister for Health, the member

for Frankston in the other place, Geoff Shaw, has been silent and remains silent now that this ward is remaining closed.

The facts bear out this situation, with under 60 per cent of ambulances transferring patients within 40 minutes. The member for Frankston seems to be oblivious to these issues, or alternatively he just does not care. The statistics show that the Frankston Hospital is in dire need of assistance. The community and the medical profession know this, but the Baillieu government and Geoff Shaw refuse to acknowledge it.

As the local member, Geoff Shaw is more than happy to attend ribbon cuttings — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, President, the member, for whom I generally have high regard, is using his members statement to sledge a member in the other chamber and is reflecting on him in the process, so I ask you to bring him to order.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Tarlamis would be aware that if there is a substantive allegation or concern to be raised about a member in another place, then it needs to be done by a substantive motion rather than by a 90-second statement or an adjournment matter. As I understand it, the criticism of the member referred to does not approach the level that I would regard requires a substantive motion. Nevertheless, I caution Mr Tarlamis, although I think he understands that rule anyway.

Mr TARLAMIS — The member for Frankston, rather than attending ribbon cuttings, would do well to explain to his constituents why he has remained silent when it comes to the significant issues in Frankston.

Alfredton Primary School: camps

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I rise to speak on behalf of the parents of the Alfredton Primary School, who have contacted me in disappointment that the school, under the direction of the principal and the Australian Education Union (AEU), has cancelled both the years 3 and 4 camp to Queenscliff and the year 6 camp to Canberra.

Whilst they cite the imposition of a ban on working over the 38 hours during the enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations as the reason, it is the children who are suffering, as they had high expectations and were excited about visiting both Queenscliff and Canberra. We have already seen the AEU action directly impacting on children due to strike days and teachers refusing to write written reports, with parents

being unable to make a judgement on their child's progress.

I do not doubt teachers work hard and are committed to their task, to which my schoolteacher daughter will attest, but the ban on school camps at Alfredton sinks to a new low. I hope the school council hears the pleas of the parents that industrial action should be conducted at arm's length as teachers negotiate their award so it does not affect the children.

Wind farms: Macarthur

Mr RAMSAY — On another matter, I would like to thank Annie and Gus Gardner, who hosted me at their farm last week so I could personally see the proximity of the Macarthur wind farm to their home and property. I heard stories from others on that day about the health impacts they believe the turbines have on them from even up to 5 kilometres away. My hope is that a private members bill that is to come before the federal House of Representatives requesting a full inquiry into the health impacts of wind farms will be supported and will provide some justice to those who have been either ignored or ridiculed by the Green machine and the generators.

Bastion Point: boat ramp

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — It was great to see Bob Brown on the front page of the new-look *Age* yesterday in a story by Adam Morton about how the campaign to save the Franklin River was won. The article states that Bob was:

Overlooking the site of the Franklin blockade for the first time in five years ... While he believes the public's concern about the environment is greater than ever, the political value placed on untouched areas far from where most Australians live ...

is difficult to maintain. He is quoted as saying:

We are in an extraordinary situation where we —

by 'we' I think he means governments —

don't take pride in our world heritage properties the way other countries do.

He was keen to say that the Franklin River was saved by the community and that he was proud of the 20 000 people who marched in Fremantle last week to protest against the development at James Price Point in Western Australia. He was also quoted as saying:

Once it is gone you can't get it back.

In far East Gippsland the local community is fighting to save a pristine wilderness area from unnecessary,

unsafe and inappropriate development. The Minister for Environment and Climate Change has given inexplicable coastal consent for the construction of a boat ramp at Bastion Point. I ask him and the East Gippsland Shire Council to think ahead so that in 30 years people can have a wilderness coast at Bastion Point and not an inappropriate, unsafe development that could result in the death of people who launch boats unsafely as a result of that boat ramp.

David Blackburn

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to speak on a significant achievement and accolade to be awarded to David Blackburn, a constituent from Western Victoria Region. Mr Blackburn will be awarded the Australian Fire Services Medal (AFSM) later this year. Mr Blackburn, a farmer from Woorndoo, has been recognised with the highest honour in fire services for his 35 years of service to the Country Fire Authority (CFA). Mr Blackburn was particularly humble in his response. He was quoted in the local newspaper as saying:

I'm quite honoured, but it's really a team effort for the Westmere group.

He went on to say:

I see this AFSM as recognition of the CFA looking after its local community and if I have played a role in that, then it's pleasing.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Blackburn who joined the Woorndoo CFA in 1986 after an eight-year stint at the Hexham CFA, as well as serving as both deputy group officer and group officer of the Westmere group. This summer alone has showed us the importance and value of our CFA volunteers. This award is a just reward for Mr Blackburn's service.

David Shalders

Ms TIERNEY — On another matter, I would like to congratulate David Shalders from Mortlake who has been awarded the 2012 Dan Brumley Abbeyfield Foundation Scholarship to help him get his tertiary studies under way. He has been accepted into the school of animal and veterinary sciences at Charles Sturt University after completing his Victorian certificate of education in Mortlake last year. David is an extremely hardworking young man, with strong direction and focus. Again I congratulate David on this achievement and wish him well for his ongoing future studies.

G & K O'Connor Pty Ltd

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — We all know that in Melbourne's growth corridors and indeed the growth corridors around Victoria that it is important to create local jobs for local people. Having locally based jobs takes pressure off our infrastructure — our roads and public transport — and means people can get home to their families and be more involved in the communities they live in. In that context I was very pleased to join the Minister for Planning and representatives of G & K O'Connor's abattoir in Pakenham, together with the member for Bass in the other place, to announce amendment C176 to the Cardinia planning scheme, which will help facilitate the creation of 800 new jobs and over \$300 million of investment at O'Connor's abattoir. It is a fantastic investment for the south-east.

This facility based on the Koo Wee Rup-Pakenham roads will benefit from the Koo Wee Rup bypass because it will make the transportation of livestock more efficient and simpler. It is a fantastic investment for the south-east growth corridor and good news for jobs. I would like to pay credit to the Cardinia Shire Council and O'Connor's abattoir for their vision for this project and their commitment to the local community in Pakenham. It is great news for jobs, great news for the south-east and great news for those local communities where those jobs will be created.

Climate Commission: *The Angry Summer*

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — Members will have seen the Climate Commission's report entitled *The Angry Summer*. We have all noticed that the summer just past been a warm one, and surely no member of this Parliament can now deny that the facts contained in the report are more disturbing than anything we have previously seen. The report says that the data — the facts — show that this country is warmer and moister than it was 50 years ago, that climate change is already adversely affecting Australians, that extreme hot weather will become more frequent and that we need to continue to prepare for emergencies.

There are some in this chamber who have attempted to denigrate the work of the Climate Commission and ridicule its head, Professor Tim Flannery, by attributing to him oversimplified viewpoints.

The Bureau of Meteorology's Blair Trewin confirmed the Climate Commission's report that the average temperature across Australia this summer was 28.6 degrees — above the previous record by

0.1 degrees. Professor Will Steffen said that the weather in the summer just past is the result of human activity and that the Climate Commission's data confirms this.

The increasingly severe storms in North America, the biting cold weather in Europe and the tornados, floods and droughts in China, for example, show that Victoria and Australia are not alone. The suffering and exhaustion of many Australians whose towns have been more and more frequently devastated by flood, fire and crippling drought should be enough to bring the cheap laughs in this chamber to an end.

Economy: government achievements

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — Victorians have welcomed a new report from Moody's that highlights the need for strong financial management and expenditure restraint in challenging circumstances. The report, a special comment on the sector outlook for Australian states and territories, shows the extent of measures taken by the Victorian coalition government to control costs and strengthen Victoria's budget position.

The report clearly depicts the strength of Victoria's financial positions relative to other states. Victoria now has the strongest finances in Australia and is the only state in Australia to be forecasting consistent budget surpluses over the next four years. It is also the only state in Australia to hold a AAA credit rating with a stable outlook from both international ratings agencies. This rating enhances our economic and fiscal reputation, attracts foreign investors and boosts business confidence. It also improves our ability to raise capital at lower borrowing rates to plan, build and deliver the infrastructure Victoria needs after a decade of neglect by the former Labor government.

The Baillieu coalition government's resolve to constrain expenditure, drive further efficiencies in government and stick to its wages policy has enabled it to maintain a sound budget position despite losing more than \$6 billion in GST revenue from Canberra. I commend the Treasurer, the Assistant Treasurer and the Minister for Finance for their stewardship.

City of Brimbank: management plan

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — Last week I had the pleasure of meeting the new chair of administrators at Brimbank City Council, Dr John Watson; the CEO, Bill Jaboor; and administrator Jane Nathan. I had the further pleasure of being in the company of many fine and caring ALP members of Parliament from both houses, but sadly not one Liberal

MP was present. I must commend the administrators and staff at Brimbank for presenting such an amazing concept to us for the future of our community — and indeed, I must add, for the future of the Western Metropolitan Region, which will benefit if their proposal is successful. It is a plan to reinvigorate employment, business, learning, parks and trails as well as main roads, all to the benefit not solely of their community but even of those who, for example, use Main Road, St Albans, to travel to neighbouring communities.

Brimbank is deep within the heart of my electorate, and it contains one of the highest demographical diversities, the most multicultural backgrounds and some of the poorest people in all of Melbourne — a tragedy which we on this side have long been committed to turning around.

In conclusion I must again commend the leadership team and staff at Brimbank. They clearly have a vision for the future, and they will not rest until their vision is achieved.

Bushfires: tourism

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — Thank you, President, for giving me an opportunity to make some remarks today. I thank all those firefighters in different agencies who were involved in the containment of the two major bushfires in eastern Victoria, both in the north-east and in Gippsland — the Aberfeldy complex and the Harrietville complex — which, as of the end of last week, were contained. However, ‘contained’ does not mean ‘out’; they are still burning, and there is still a lot of smoke around. Coincidentally the Department of Sustainability and Environment’s planned burning program has commenced for this season, and I think that is important.

We have a problem, which I bring to the attention of the house and urge all members to address in their own way, if they can — that is, the need to communicate with the Victorian community at large, particularly those in Melbourne, that things are under control. It is safe to visit the north-east and Gippsland in particular. We urge anybody who is thinking about a long weekend excursion or an Easter excursion to travel east and visit places such as Walhalla, Omeo and Dinner Plain, which is very pleasant. We need tourism in eastern Victoria.

Department of Primary Industries: job losses

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — The new *State of the Public Sector in Victoria* report tabled in

Parliament two weeks ago has shed further light on the vast number of job losses at the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in the 12 months to June 2012. The figures make for rather sobering reading. In June last year there were just 2161 people working for the DPI compared to 2408 people in 2010–11. These figures represent a drop of 247 staff or approximately 10 per cent. In addition, the figures seem to exclude the 200 voluntary redundancies which occurred in September 2012. It is imperative that we consider the impact those redundancies will have on our rural and regional communities, for it will not just be the primary producers who suffer.

This fall in staff numbers represents an immeasurable loss of knowledge across many industry sectors. Farmers have informed me that they are unsure about which services DPI will now be providing. It is a big impact both in terms of immediate jobs and in making it difficult for people to access services. Offices that service my electorate, including those at Cobram, Birchip, Kyneton, Ouyen and St Arnaud, have closed. Reception services will cease or have already ceased at Kerang, Echuca, Swan Hill and Rutherglen, and members of the public will now have to use an intercom to make contact with staff.

A decrease in support for agricultural communities has a significant impact on local economies with a flow-on effect to our service and sporting clubs, retail sectors and schools. Clearly the Liberal-Nationals government does not value the significant contribution of Victoria’s farmers to the economy.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member’s time has expired.

Melbourne Food and Wine Festival

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — The Melbourne Food and Wine Festival features prominently in Melbourne’s major events calendar and is well known to many who are involved in the hospitality, food and wine sectors. The festival runs for 17 days, and it provides a range of events across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, including picnics, rickshaw runs, fine dining events and cook-offs. It is important to our tourist, hospitality and food and wine industries and contributes significantly to our overall economy.

I was delighted to join the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, Richard Dalla-Riva, at Como House in South Yarra for the Cellar Door and Artisan Market on Saturday, which is a signature event of the 2013 festival, to attend the HOSTPLUS Cook for Your

Career grand finale cook-off. This event was part of the Put Victoria on Your Table brand, and it showcased local and regional produce. The two finalists, both from interstate, experienced firsthand a taste of Melbourne at its best. In return, visitors to the Cellar Door and Artisan Market were able to sample produce and see the talents of the two talented cook-off finalists, Rod and Toni.

It was no wonder that the CEO of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, Natalie O'Brien, was delighted with the event and with the tremendous response from the 70-odd international journalists who are visiting this year's festival and writing about Victoria's fabulous offerings. It was a great day, and with plenty more events to come, I urge members to attend events whilst the festival continues.

Jewish Care: 165th anniversary

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I congratulate Jewish Care on 165 years of service. It is an extraordinary story. In 1848 the Victorian Jewish population was 200; today more than 51 000 people are included in Jewish Care's aim of building a healthier, more inclusive and diverse community.

I particularly congratulate its president, Mike Debinski, who is leading Jewish Care into the future and doing a phenomenal job. He said recently:

Jewish Care and its predecessors helped society's most vulnerable since the mid-1800s; we accommodated children fleeing from Nazi Europe in the 1930s, assisted the survivors of the Holocaust as they arrived penniless and traumatised from their experiences, and assisted immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former USSR in the 1940s and then again in the 70s and 80s. We also established Victoria's largest Jewish aged residence, Montefiore Homes, in 1948.

I have had firsthand experience with Jewish Care. Its employees are total professionals. They care enormously for their very diverse group of people. One of the issues I have spoken about in this place before is the issue of aged care. The Holocaust survivors Mike Debinski spoke of are now sadly reliving many of the traumas they experienced when they were young. The mind is a vicious implement. Not only did they live those traumatic experiences in the Holocaust but they are now reliving them because of dementia. Jewish Care is cognisant of the challenges it faces, and I congratulate all concerned.

Western suburbs: federal government support

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — There were no words to describe my excitement when I heard the Prime Minister, Ms Gillard, was to visit the western

suburbs to meet with locals, hear of their problems and, most importantly, shower them with gold in order to gain their favour. 'At long last', I thought to myself, 'we'll get some federal cash for the desperately needed east-west link. Maybe we'll get some federal money for our overstretched health services. There are so many needs, and the Prime Minister is riding into town to grant our every wish'. I was barely able to breathe from excitement.

The house can imagine my disgust when I discovered that Ms Gillard was not headed for Ravenhall but for Rooty Hill and that she was not going to spend time with the good people of Melbourne's west but was going to try to win back disgruntled Labor voters in Sydney who, unfortunately for her, can see right through her pathetic election stunt and are making their disgust abundantly clear. While Julia Gillard is spending the week in Sydney's west in a vain attempt to save the ALP, the people of Melbourne's western suburbs are wondering when we will get our fair share from her. Despite the fact we have the Prime Minister herself and two other federal ministers — three until recently — allegedly representing us in the west, we get precious little from Canberra.

The anger felt by those of us in the western suburbs as we watched our Sydney counterparts being bribed to within an inch of their lives will not be forgotten easily. We will not forget that we rarely see Julia Gillard, federal Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Brendan O'Connor or federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations Bill Shorten, much less get a sniff of the newly printed banknotes they are flashing around Sydney's west in such large quantities. Most importantly, we will not forget that preparing to dump local MPs brings national attention and is the sort of manna from heaven we could previously only dream of. Who knows — if we get angry enough, we might even score ourselves a visit from the Prime Minister.

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house requires the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee to inquire into the extent and implications of the psychological and physical injuries suffered by Victorian firefighters due to the changing nature of their work, including, but not limited to, a dramatic increase in responding to traumatic incidents such as suicides, road accidents and occurrences of sudden infant death syndrome and the committee is required to table an interim report no later than 28 May 2013 and a final report no later than 20 August 2013.

I am pleased to commence the debate on notice of motion 531. This motion relates to the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee, a committee that is not overwhelmed with tasks at the moment, and requests that it consider the extent and implications of the psychological and physical injuries suffered by Victorian firefighters due to the changing nature of their work.

As we are talking about firefighters and the work that they do in fighting fires, I will take the opportunity to support Mr Philip Davis's comments in his members statement earlier today about the need for all of us to reassure the Victorian public, in the latter part of this summer's fire season, that regional Victoria is absolutely open for business. The parts of the state that experienced fires are open for business and most are safe to visit. Wonderful rebuilding efforts are taking place in communities, which I think are worthy of the support of all Victorians as they plan their long weekend activities. Mr Davis talked about communities in the east of the state. I am sure my colleagues from Northern Victoria Region would say the same about the north of the state and that my colleagues in Western Victoria Region would agree that, in spite of significant fires in western Victoria over the summer, there are many great places to visit and experiences to be had that are safe, enjoyable and incredibly important to those communities.

This motion arises in response to a report that was recently publicised by the United Firefighters Union of Australia. The report was prepared for that organisation by the Centre of Full Employment and Equity at the University of Newcastle. The report considers the impacts of firefighting. When great danger arises, most of us, in whatever line of work we are in or however we spend our time, move away from that danger, but firefighters run straight into it. The risks to the health of firefighters are significant. Recently in Victoria we had the tragic loss of two Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) firefighters — a tragedy for those firefighters' families, colleagues and communities. This is a very real and contemporary issue.

The report found a great many impacts, physical and psychological, that affect firefighters. I will briefly speak about some of these. The report considered international literature on the health impacts of firefighting, including the impact of the inherent duties, the exposure to hazardous substances and an increased prevalence of illnesses, such as coronary and respiratory disease and various types of cancer, a subject of debate in Australia for a number of years. Some jurisdictions, not including Victoria, consider the relationship between different types of cancer and

firefighting is such that there is a requirement for presumptive workers compensation rights for firefighters who are exposed to these kinds of hazards. The report also considers the impact of stress on psychological health, including the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, suicide and substance abuse.

The many firefighters in Victoria, including those with the DSE, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Authority, do a remarkable job and provide an essential service to our community. Victorians have been scarred by the trauma of the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009. This Parliament will continue to respond to the findings of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and its recommendations, and the government will implement the recommendations, as it said it would, 'lock, stock and barrel'. However, we are still waiting to see that.

It is concerning to note the budget cuts that have been made by the government to Victoria's fire services. This report indicates that budget cuts place additional pressure on those at the front line, which is hardly surprising.

The report talks about factors inherent in the job of firefighters. It indicates that the role of firefighters as first responders to incidents contributes to the trauma firefighters experience on the job. The report details incidents firefighters deal with in the normal course of their duties, and these include witnessing the death or injury of co-workers or patients, sustaining a serious injury, being exposed to hazardous substances or attending multiple fatalities or incidents involving infants or young children. We can only imagine the trauma suffered by our firefighters and the impact that repeated exposure to these kinds of traumas can have on them.

The report addresses the physical cost of the work of firefighters. One incident outlined in the report is that of firefighters rescuing children on the second floor of a residence. The report indicates that in such a situation firefighters' heart rates rise to levels in excess of 100 per cent of their predicted maximum, and then the report goes into the physical impacts of that kind of exertion many hours after the incident. The report cites research that states that:

... the physical and emotional triggers for heart attack stay with the firefighter for some time after an incident.

I am sure there is no debate about the risks incurred by firefighters or about the extraordinary contribution that they make in keeping our society safe. The report gives rise to very serious questions about how we provide

appropriate and safe support for our firefighters, and I think the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee is well equipped to look into these issues in more detail.

The Economy and Infrastructure References Committee, of which I am a member, does not have a current reference. Indeed it would appear that the government has sought to shut down that committee along with the other two references committees in this Parliament. Interestingly a notice of motion given by the Leader of the Government, the Minister for Health, that sits on the notice paper today refers to a matter that by any objective reading is a matter for the references committee, but Mr Davis indicates he would prefer it to go to the Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee. That is not a reference that relates to legislation. Perhaps if Mr Davis brought that particular item on for debate, we could flesh out the roles of the various committees in detail, but the government's disdain for the upper house parliamentary committees continues.

I believe members of the references committees would welcome the opportunity to do some real work. A meeting of the committee was scheduled for last week. The meeting did not proceed and it has not been rescheduled, and I could suggest that that is because the meeting agenda was so thin. Another committee is taking its turn to stop the house from sitting tonight, so on this occasion our committee appears to be off the hook.

The Economy and Infrastructure References Committee could do a good job of considering this issue. It is not unrelated to some of the issues canvassed in the Victorian Auditor-General's report, *Management of Unplanned Leave in Emergency Services*, that was tabled in the house today. That report was tabled less than an hour ago and I have not had an opportunity to peruse it in detail, but a brief reading indicates that there has been a slight reduction in unplanned leave at the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. However, it does indicate that there are some challenges around health issues and the other causes of unplanned leave for our emergency services workers. It also relates to agencies other than our firefighting agencies.

This report raises incredibly serious issues about the impacts of firefighting on our firefighters, and as a result the United Firefighters Union has sought a meeting with the Premier, Ted Baillieu, and the Deputy Premier and Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Peter Ryan. With all the other distractions bedevilling the government at the moment I am not sure that the union has much chance of discussing these

issues with the government in the short term. I hope the government takes the health of firefighters as seriously as it takes its internal rumblings, but we will have to wait and see.

In any event, these issues are worth consideration by a committee that does not have anything else to do at the moment. The inquiry would be a good use of the skills and efforts of the members of the committee, and I encourage members of the government to allow this motion to pass and not use their numbers to block it so that committee members, in their work as members of Parliament, can investigate further the health impacts of firefighting on Victorian emergency services workers. I commend the motion to the house.

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — Fluff! What I just heard was absolute fluff. In fact I was sitting here listening with interest to the contribution made by the opposition member to her motion to establish a parliamentary inquiry. I anticipated that I would hear a reasoned case for such an inquiry to be established, but what I heard convinced me that the member, who is proposing a reference to a committee upon which she serves, is unable to adequately describe what the purpose of that inquiry would be; therefore, and if for no other reason, I will oppose the member's motion. There are more substantive reasons that I will come to, but I have to say — and I make this point advisedly and being patronisingly candid to the member — that if the member wants to come into this place and move a serious motion about establishing a parliamentary committee inquiry, then a substantive case needs to be made for that inquiry.

I refer to Ms Hartland's item of general business, notice of motion 528, which deals with similar issues and about which I hope and expect we will talk later this day. I give Ms Hartland credit for putting in the effort of detailing why in her view that legislation should be brought before this house.

My point is this: at the end of the day Parliament is a serious business. In my view, to come in here and say, 'I think it would be a good idea if we sat around and had a talk about this stuff because something might come out of it, and we are ticking the box for the firefighters union', is not adequate. Ms Hartland, to give her credit — and sometimes I do not give her enough credit — invested considerable resources in setting out the case for why she believes the Parliament should act in this matter, which contrasts markedly with the paucity of the argument presented by Ms Pulford this morning.

Ms Pulford's motion states:

That this house requires the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee to inquire into the extent and implications of the psychological and physical injuries suffered by Victorian firefighters due to the changing nature of their work, including, but not limited to, a dramatic increase in responding to traumatic incidents such as suicides, road accidents and occurrences of sudden infant death syndrome and the committee is required to table an interim report no later than 28 May 2013 and a final report no later than 20 August 2013.

This is a serious motion and warrants a serious debate, but the debate has to be framed in terms of substance, not process, and the only material case Ms Pulford ran in relation to this matter was in regard to process. As I said in my opening remark, the rest of it was fluff.

I note the Leader of the Opposition moved a motion, which was agreed to yesterday, that this motion should be the first matter considered by the house today in general business, and presumably Ms Hartland's motion — that is, notice of motion 528 standing in her name relating to similar matters — will be the last item for consideration today. This concerns me, because frankly it seems to me that the opposition — that is, the Labor opposition — is somehow trying to steal the agenda which Ms Hartland has established in dealing with a serious matter.

Given the effort she had made to engage the Parliament on this issue, I should have thought Ms Hartland deserved the opportunity to, if not run her case together with a motion coming from the Labor Party — in fact that should have been a priority — at least run her case subordinate to the principal motion moved by the major opposition party. Ms Hartland is entitled to feel aggrieved, because by the end of today we might not have gotten to her motion. Unfortunately that is the way the opposition runs opposition business days. Many issues listed for debate do not get on for debate. On the balance of probabilities and based on previous expectations, I would think Ms Hartland's motion will not be dealt with today, so I suggest to the opposition that it seek to amend its order of business and bring Ms Hartland's motion on. I can inform the house that the government will not support Ms Pulford's motion, but it is likely to support Ms Hartland's motion.

Ms Broad interjected.

Mr P. DAVIS — Thank you, Ms Broad, for that comment. Let us get to it. Let us have a substantive debate about the issues. I look forward to Ms Broad's contribution.

My view on the motion moved by Ms Pulford is that the opposition has brought to us a matter that is clearly not as substantive and serious as is Ms Hartland's proposed motion on firefighters. This motion is vague. It is a call for an inquiry which is incredibly significant and serious but with a ridiculously short time frame. Frankly I do not think any parliamentary committee, no matter how well resourced by a secretariat, could do justice to such a broad inquiry, and therefore it seems to me that this is simply political opportunism to curry some favour with the United Firefighters Union of Australia. That speaks for itself.

One of the facts we need to have in the debate is of course entitlement to compensation for workplace injuries, including psychological or physical injuries. All workers — that is, professional firefighters employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Authority (CFA), and by extension CFA volunteers and also, separately, firefighters in other agencies, including the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria — are entitled to compensation for workplace injury. It is evident that the government has made it clear previously that it is working with the Victorian WorkCover Authority (VWA) to assist with firefighters who have WorkCover claims via the new guidance material on lodging a claim which has been developed by VWA. As recently as January this year I noted new guidance material for firefighters issued by WorkCover to give firefighters a better understanding of their entitlements in lodging a claim, particularly in relation to long-tail claims such as those for cancers. Of course any employee in this state is entitled to make a claim for workplace injury, and they should be encouraged to lodge a WorkCover claim where that is appropriate.

In reference to the debate around Ms Hartland's bill, which I expect we will have hopefully later this day, if the Labor opposition allows it to occur, the President made a ruling about that in the previous sitting week. We would concur with the President that it is constitutionally defective, but the suggestion that that bill be referred to the legislation committee is more appropriate than the reference proposed by Ms Pulford, which is really about somehow having a broad inquiry to open a broader base for debate rather than a substantive, beneficial outcome for firefighters who have a genuine workplace claim. Therefore we will oppose that referral.

I want to make some more general comments, particularly about the issue of firefighters. I say this with some real commitment to the respect I have for people in all of our emergency services and agencies who put themselves in harm's way. There are many

people who as a matter of course have a heightened risk in their workplace compared to many others. Working in Parliament House, apart from losing one's footing on the staircases, is a fairly low-risk environment compared to working in the field of firefighting operations, whether that be in dwellings or industrial fires or, much more in my experience, firefighting operations in grasslands and native forests.

I do not pretend to have a close and intimate understanding of contemporary firefighting practice, because it is some time since I rode on the back of CFA trucks, but I had more than 20 years experience as a CFA volunteer. Coincidentally I also spent some four years as a first responder to fires in the Bass Strait oil fields. I was an operator with Esso Australia in Gippsland, and one of the primary duties of the operational staff was to be a first responder in plant fires. I have had experience fighting oil and gas fires, grassfires and bushfires, and I can tell the house that that experience taught me about the criticality of the interdependency of people and the need to ensure that the challenges faced were cooperatively managed in a disciplined way to minimise the risk. I feel saddened every time I hear of the death of a firefighter, whether it is in an urban, rural or bush environment, because I know that these are risky vocations.

We owe much to the fact that the environment of Australia is such that there are ongoing bushfires. Many people have short memories and need to be reminded that every summer there are bushfires around Victoria, and in some summers those fires are bigger than in other years. I make no claim about the size or dimension of the recent major fires in eastern Victoria and in the Grampians; in the scale of things they could probably be described as business as usual to some degree. Unfortunately those fires have impacted on not just farm property but also domestic dwellings, and a life was lost in the case of the Seaton fire. In the north-east two firefighters died while on firefighting duties, and that is tragic.

The point I make is that firefighters, whether they work for a land management agency such as the Department of Sustainability and Environment or Parks Victoria, as employees of or volunteers with the CFA or as staff of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, are all entitled under compensation law to the presumption that if they have a workplace injury, they have the same rights regardless of the agency they are associated with and regardless of whether or not they are firefighters or other emergency service workers associated with the fire emergency. Those workplace injuries include the matters raised in the proposed reference and in the bill Ms Hartland wishes to progress.

The purpose of Ms Pulford's motion is a little bit of a mystery to me. I note that she is so committed to the progress of this motion that she left the chamber within 20 minutes of the debate commencing. Her 10-minute speech was fluff, as I have said now three times. I do not consider that the case made out by the opposition is adequate or substantive enough for anyone to take the motion seriously. However, I take up Ms Hartland's position. She attempted — going back, I think, to June last year — to introduce a bill. She met with some disappointment, perhaps as a result of procedural matters, and she will try to revive the bill later this day by way of a procedural motion to refer the bill to the Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee.

I am not quite sure of the purpose of Ms Hartland's motion; it seems to be an attempt to have a parliamentary committee rewrite the bill for her. Perhaps she will make that clear. Ms Hartland introduced a constitutionally non-complying bill to this house, and I would be surprised if she did not know when she brought the bill in that it would not comply with the rules of procedure. I am not sure why it is up to a committee to rewrite the bill, in effect on her behalf; but we will hear more about that. I indicate to Ms Hartland that the government is not opposed to that course of action, which will better inform the Parliament and the community about the principles that are established by the proposed legislation. I have no doubt we will hear more from Ms Hartland.

Coming back to the general point about firefighters and whether or not the government is sympathetic to their needs, I say to Ms Hartland — and I will repeat it for Ms Pulford — that the government is sympathetic to the needs of firefighters. When they are fighting fires firefighters have to make decisions as part of their professional duties, and in many cases beyond their professional duties, to avoid risk to their colleagues and to minimise risk to the community. Hard decisions are made, and inevitably firefighters are at physical risk. The job of fire managers — incident controllers in incident control centres who deal with bushfires, for example — is to minimise the risk to life and limb, especially of firefighting crews. We have had enough tragedies in Victoria over the years to have learnt something about how that works.

Ms Pulford surprisingly segued into commenting on my remarks in members statements earlier today about tourism. I would not have raised this myself, but apparently she did as part of her principal argument in support of this motion. I will take the opportunity, given that she has widened the debate, to say that, yes, there is a major problem as a result of this summer's bushfires in regional Victoria. That major problem is a

perception which has evolved due to media coverage night after night of blazing infernos in the bush and in particular social media messages about the danger of the infernos in regional Victoria. It was particularly regrettable that those messages focused primarily on the Gippsland region. That has had a significant adverse impact on rural communities in terms of their business-as-usual approach.

Not only have bushfires and their subsequent economic damage impacted directly on individuals who have lost homes and tens of kilometres of fencing or livestock but we have also had the added complication of the perception of safety in rural areas. Some of these towns — for example, Walhalla, Dargo, Omeo and Licola — have had virtually no visitors. It is my recollection from recent conversations I have had with people in Walhalla that as of Tuesday last week there was not a single reservation for a bed for this coming long weekend in Walhalla — not one single reservation, let alone any forward bookings for Easter.

Frankly, this is directly related to the blunt instrument of fire alerts, which emergency services organisations have repeatedly had broadcast on public media, and to the repetition of those messages throughout the news cycle and news media, as well as media coverage of fires burning and the impression that the metropolitan community in particular has gained of the fire safety risks as a result. In most circumstances those communities which generally depend to a high degree on tourism visitation have literally and regrettably had that visitation cut off because people have elected not to take up that opportunity.

I congratulate all the fire managers and their respective agencies on containing these major fires by the end of last week. I congratulate VicRoads on re-opening the Great Alpine Road between Omeo and Harrietville, although it is now only open in some places to a single lane of traffic, meaning there are traffic lights regulating the passage of traffic. However, it will allow vehicles — that is, cars only; no trucks — through for holiday visitation over the long weekend, so that is a positive step.

That is a diversion. I am essentially responding to the comments made by Ms Pulford on that issue, which is somewhat off the subject of the matter of reference to a parliamentary committee in relation to occupational health and safety issues around firefighters.

This is a debate that one could pursue with some vigour in terms of detail. Not quite knowing where the debate is going to go, I am hesitant to broaden my comments too widely. I cannot see much merit in speaking at

length on this motion; I would rather invest my efforts in supporting Ms Hartland's subsequent motion on the notice paper. I will just round off my contribution in relation to the regime for firefighters under the Victorian WorkCover Authority. In summary, firefighters are entitled to make a claim under Victoria's Accident Compensation Act 1985, which provides a no-fault workplace scheme for any Victorian worker who contracts a disease or work-related illness in the course of their employment. This is available to all workers in Victoria.

The act requires employment to be a significant contributing factor where the disease is contracted in the course of a worker's employment. A disease that is due to the nature of a worker's employment, in circumstances where it can be established that the nature of the employment gave rise to a significantly greater risk of contracting the disease, is also compensable under the act. Where a clear link is established between employment and a disease the Victorian WorkCover Authority provides support and compensation. There is evidence of claims having been successful in 2012.

Coincidentally to all of this, the commonwealth Parliament has adopted some legislation of interest in this space. The commonwealth legislation effectively applies to 332 firefighters in the Australian Capital Territory and 663 who are employed with Airservices Australia. The commonwealth act is not a universal act, unlike the Victorian WorkCover Authority legislation which provides universal coverage.

As I said at the beginning of this contribution, the VWA is working with firefighters to provide better information about how claims can be made. If there is a misunderstanding about this, then it is certainly the case that the VWA is working diligently to provide information in a format which is more accessible. I note the four-page advice material available from VWA which provides the processes around which applications can be made and claims can be assessed and which also outlines the entitlements of firefighters who wish to make a claim.

The advisory note clearly sets out that a volunteer firefighter with the Country Fire Authority must make that compensation claim through the CFA. That is a separate process to that which would need to be followed by those who are employees of organisations such as the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

I do not think I need to contribute any more. I am anxious to hear whether Ms Hartland supports the Labor opposition's proposal to deal with her proposed bill through the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee as opposed to the Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee. In practical terms they are really the only two choices we have. In my view it would not be appropriate to run both of those processes concurrently. The government is clearly indicating that in this circumstance we think it appropriate to have a closer look at Ms Hartland's bill and tease out the issues around that rather than this Johnny-come-lately proposal, which I regard as a totally opportunistic attempt by the Labor Party to curry favour with the firefighters union rather than actually doing the hard yards that have already been covered by Ms Hartland.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I will respond to some of those questions, but I would like to start off by saying that there can be no misunderstanding about my regard for the United Firefighters Union of Australia and its national secretary, Peter Marshall.

On the issue of my motion on the notice paper, I do not intend to bring it on today. I would have hoped there could have been further discussions with the government; it is the government that has disappointed me on this issue. The Greens and the ALP have had a number of meetings regarding my Accident Compensation Legislation (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011. The government has been invited to each of those meetings, and it has never deemed this issue important enough for it to actually attend, which is a great disappointment to me.

As I indicated in my second-reading speech, the government could resolve this issue quite easily by bringing its own bill to the lower house, but it has chosen not to do so. It has said it does not wish to support the bill at this stage and will wait for the Monash University study, which I have to say could take several years to complete. How many firefighters will be diagnosed with various cancers in that time? The artificial barrier for them to be able to make a claim will continue to be there. I am disappointed in the government for not even being prepared to discuss the issues around this bill when we have been trying to discuss them with the government for about 10 months. That is where my disappointment lies — not in this motion.

Mr P. Davis — So the government has agreed to refer your bill to committee — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! Ms Hartland has the call.

Ms HARTLAND — I will respond to that interjection. I have repeatedly asked the government to discuss the bill. It is the one that has refused to do that.

Mr P. Davis — The government is prepared to discuss it at the committee.

Ms HARTLAND — I am not going to get into debate about the bill, but I am happy to talk to Mr Davis outside the chamber. I am disappointed in the government because it is not prepared to discuss the bill.

Mr P. Davis — But it has been listed for discussion today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! I remind members that Ms Hartland has the call. I ask her to speak on the motion and resist the urge to respond to comments and interjections which are disorderly.

Ms HARTLAND — I am more than happy to discuss the bill with any member outside this chamber and show all of the notes that have gone between my office and various government ministers in regard to this issue.

Hopefully every member speaking on this motion before the chamber today will have read the report entitled *Occupational Health Effects for Firefighters — The Extent and Implications of Physical and Psychological Injuries*. The authors are William Mitchell, a research professor of economics and director of the Centre of Full Employment and Equity at Charles Darwin University, and Beth Cook, a research fellow at the Centre of Full Employment and Equity at the University of Newcastle. They are academics with extensive experience in these areas. Their report is a good read and has excellent peer literature reviews. This document makes it quite clear that this is a motion the government should support if it supports firefighters, and coalition contributions to this motion will show whether or not they support firefighters.

I want to read several comments from the report that go to the point about why it is that we should investigate this issue more closely. On page 9 it says:

A study in Indiana monitored heart and respiration rates and blood pressure of firefighters and found that in the first 90 seconds after the alarm sounds, the heart rate reached around 80 per cent of the predicted heart rate maximum due to both the physical and the emotional response.

The Indiana study quoted in the report also notes that:

One incident captured by the study involved the rescue of children entrapped on the second floor of a fully involved residence. The incident resulted in severe physical and emotional stress on the firefighters driving heart rates to levels in excess of 100 per cent of their predicted maximum. Two hours after returning to station (some 3 hours following the completion of rescue operations), heart rates of individuals involved in the rescue remained in excess of 100 beats per minute.

The emotional stress firefighters are under is made quite clear. Throughout the report firefighters talk of themselves as being first responders; they are often first at a scene and they are doing cardiac massage et cetera, so their stress levels are high. On page 44 of the report a firefighter is quoted as saying:

If you get a call for an infant, your stress levels and reactions are through the roof. The adrenaline is going and you're driving faster, you're taking more risks ... going to a child is really stressful ...

Firefighters will be working on someone for 45 minutes, and sometimes it is 10 minutes before an ambulance turns up. Not only are they dealing with the patient but they also have to deal with the families of patients. Firefighters talk about how the work is emotionally draining, both physically and mentally.

I also hold great concerns about the exposure of firefighters when they have responded to chemical incidents.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms HARTLAND — I would like to be able to get on with my contribution on this motion rather than responding to inane comments from Mr Ramsay. People are still talking about Coode Island, are they not?

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms HARTLAND — Is it possible for me to proceed without interjection? I ask Mr Ramsay to make his statements public, and I will then respond to them.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! Ms Hartland has the call.

Ms HARTLAND — Coode Island is spoken about on page 46 of the report. Coode Island is something I know a great deal about it, because I was living about half a kilometre from it the day it went up. At that time firefighters did not have breathing apparatus or protective clothing, and yet they were told that they were safe. At that time benzene was a suspected carcinogen. It is now known to be a high-level

carcinogen. Obviously many of those firefighters are waiting to see if they were safe, because since that time several of them have contracted cancers.

This is an important report about what happens, psychologically and physically, to firefighters at work, whether it be in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade or the Country Fire Authority. If members of this Parliament and this government have any regard at all for these officers, they should change their minds and allow this matter to be dealt with by a committee so that evidence can be given and we can gain a full understanding of the issue. People who dispute this well-written report could then produce evidence to show that this does not happen, that firefighters are making it up. Whatever it is that those on the other side think about this, it is an opportunity for them to say that the report is not correct.

Unfortunately the government is not well known for allowing committees to have difficult references, references that actually matter. If there is anything the government does not want to look at, it will not happen. If the government had any regard for firefighting services, it would not have cut \$66 million from their budget.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I speak on behalf of the government on the motion moved by Ms Pulford, notice of motion 531. It is evident that we will not support the motion. It is also evident that Labor is jumping onto the bandwagon to curry favour with the United Firefighters Union of Australia. That is entirely up to it, but for it to all of a sudden pretend to offer a genuine governance of care model is simply not right. Labor has been exceptionally quiet on this issue, and then all of a sudden it has tried to make itself relevant in the field by being there when many of these cases come to bear.

The sitting week before last Ms Hartland second read a private members bill to do with presumptive rights. Last sitting week the President ruled that the bill was unconstitutional. Ms Hartland has had another go at progressing that aspect of care for firefighters. The government has indicated that it is likely to allow that reference to go through to the legislation committee of the Standing Committee on Economy and Infrastructure, and we may be debating that later today. That will effectively enable us to deal with a range of issues surrounding this presumptive rights legislation.

In relation to the report that has been spoken about in this chamber this morning, in our opinion the report was commissioned by the United Firefighters Union of Australia in effect to attempt to influence an Auditor-General's inquiry that is already well and truly

under way. We are expecting that report to be handed down imminently.

Ms Hartland interjected.

Mr DRUM — It already has been, sorry. We do not believe the report by the University of Newcastle's centre of full employment and equity to be as comprehensive or balanced as the one we expect from the Auditor-General.

The support this government has provided to firefighters in general is exceptionally strong. Country Fire Authority (CFA) funding in this year's budget was the second highest in the history of the CFA — second only to that provided in last year's budget. In our two years in government the coalition has produced two record budgets to assist the CFA. In doing so, we have made sure that care and support for firefighters through services such as peer support, chaplaincy and psychological and medical assistance has been at a level commensurate with previous budgets.

Much has been said in other forums about CFA savings. No firefighter support, chaplaincy, medical assistance or psychological assistance programs have been affected by any savings measures. Many of these programs go back 25 years. There are over 150 peers in the peer support network — an enormous group of people who are able to offer assistance when it is needed.

Members can be assured that we are working very closely with the firefighters in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, the CFA and the Department of Sustainability and Environment — the professionals and the volunteers. We understand the pressures they face and the benefits they provide to the community. We understand how hard it is to be a first responder, we understand the stress firefighters are under and we understand that in many instances that has been the case for many decades.

While in some instances the work of firefighters is becoming more unpredictable and difficult because of some of the chemicals involved in industrial fires, the methods chosen to fight bushfires and house fires is now far more conservative than it has ever been, because every time we have a tragedy in the firefighting field we make sure that the very next time we attend a fire even greater care is taken. Greater protective measures are taken to ensure that the preservation of life and the welfare of our firefighters comes first and foremost when placing them at risk in the field on a daily basis.

We are doing everything we possibly can to ensure that the health of our firefighters is our no. 1 priority, and we are making sure that the agencies surrounding their health are undiminished if not strengthened by record budgets under this government. While there is always a lot of talk from members of the previous government, the opposition, and sometimes from the Greens that we are not doing enough, this government has put in more support for our firefighters than ever before, and it is not just the support that happens after an event. Since coming to government I have played a very minor role in the graduation process of our CFA professional firefighting groups at Fiskville. I have been out there, I think, four times to attend graduations. You see the 20-odd graduates having been through the program for many weeks, and you see their proud families who come from all around Victoria and some from interstate to watch their sons and daughters graduate at Fiskville. Of course we know that Fiskville has had issues in relation to some of the chemicals that have been used there in the past.

Training in how to deal with many of the risks, stresses and predicaments that firefighters are going to be placed in is also at a never-before-reached level. We continue to offer anybody who is suffering from either a mental or physical illness assistance with their WorkCover claims and peers to help them through whatever the issues are, and, we are putting more and more energy and resources into training firefighters in the first instance to enable them to be more resilient and more able to deal with the workload that they have opted into as a career.

We understand that it is extremely tough on both our volunteers and our professional firefighters. We understand that the situations they are placed in are unpredictable and ever changing, but in many instances that has been the case for decades. In the last month or so we have witnessed some tragedies with our firefighters. Whenever these tragedies occur we all stop and reflect on the enormous job our firefighters do for our communities. They are the first to be called in the event of a fire, but they are also called to help with other emergencies, such as flooding.

I will return to the motion. Although we fully acknowledge the great work our professional and volunteer firefighters do and the tough circumstances that they work under, we do not believe a full-blown inquiry by a committee that would report in August, which is what is being suggested by the Labor Party through this motion, would be the best way of dealing with this issue. Instead we have considered the prospect of supporting a motion to be moved by Ms Hartland later in the day, which would give us an opportunity to

refer this matter to the Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee for inquiry.

I hope members reflect on the way we approach our firefighters with genuine balance and with genuine care and concern and an eye for the history so they can genuinely compare that with how previous governments have treated exactly the same group of people. If people make an honest and genuine comparison, then and only then will they be truly qualified to talk on this particular issue.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

HOSPITALS: WAITING LISTS

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house notes —

- (1) that when the Baillieu government came to office the waiting list for elective surgery was 38 897;
- (2) with dismay, on behalf of Victorian patients, that for the last five quarters in a row, elective surgery waiting lists have been on each successive occasion the highest ever recorded in Victoria, with the most recent list showing the number of patients waiting is now at an appalling and unacceptable record high of 47 760;

and calls on the Baillieu government to restore sufficient Victorian funding to our health services to enable them to reduce waiting lists for elective surgery to at least the same number of people who were on the list at the time of the election in 2010.

I move this motion, which has unfortunately come to be a constant theme of attack by the opposition, on behalf of the Victorian community, the media, people who work in our hospitals and people who care for the sick in our community who feel the need to complain about the appalling performance of the Baillieu government in health and health service delivery in the last two years. This has been despite the fact that when the Baillieu government came to office it promised to improve the performance of the hospital system; it promised to increase the number of hospital beds in our system; it promised to reduce the elective surgery waiting lists; it promised to improve the response times in emergency departments; it promised to improve the response times of ambulances to respond to emergencies; and it promised to respond to community concerns and to patient risk at the earliest opportunity. It promised to deliver all of these things. These were

important commitments that the government made to the people of Victoria.

The Labor government invested significantly in health. We made health a priority. Time and again we were confronted with the reality of the extraordinary demands placed on the hospital system in Victoria and the extraordinarily high expectation of our community that services be available at a time when they are needed and that the community demanded in order to have confidence in the health system. Every single day during the period of our administration we were aware of this issue's importance to the people of Victoria.

When the people of Victoria elected a new government they gave it the benefit of the doubt that it would deliver on its election promises to improve the health system. However, the people of Victoria must today be bitterly disappointed in what they have seen over the last two years from the Baillieu government, and given the concern they have for themselves and their loved ones, they must be profoundly distressed about the quality of care they are receiving in the Victorian hospital system.

During the last week the Minister for Health reluctantly and begrudgingly released hospital statistics that indicate the fragility of the system and the deteriorating performance of our hospitals, leading to a deterioration in the people of Victoria's confidence in Victoria's hospital system. Those statistics were released on 28 February. Even though they were available to be released as far back as October last year, it took the Minister for Health, David Davis, from October until near the end of February to release the figures for the 2012 September quarter. He mischievously tried to hide that data by simultaneously releasing the December 2012 figures.

Now that we have this information, what does it tell the people of Victoria? What does it tell patients? It shows that in that reporting period a record 1408 people waited more than 24 hours in an emergency department to receive the care that they sought from that hospital. Health services have failed to meet targets in the area of category 3 urgent emergency department patients. Hospitals have also failed to meet targets in category 2 semi-urgent elective surgery. There has been a blow-out in elective surgery waiting lists with more than 1600 additional people being added to those lists, and ambulance transfer times have fallen well short of the 90 per cent target.

Over four months the health minister tried to withhold this data from the scrutiny of the Victorian community by running a campaign which mischievously misled

Victorians about the impact of an adjustment by the commonwealth of its payments to Victoria's health system. Instead the minister should have taken responsibility for improving health care in Victoria.

Commonwealth health payments to Victoria this year are \$3.6 billion. They are part of a continual increase which will see a significant growth in the commonwealth contribution to health in Victoria. Over the next three years the health-care funds provided to Victoria by the commonwealth will grow by in excess of \$900 million. The Baillieu government investment will fall well short of that, and this comes at a time when the Baillieu government has ripped \$616 million out of health in its first two budgets. It has chosen to shift its priorities away from what it promised before the election. It promised the people of Victoria that it would improve the health system, but it has mercilessly withdrawn \$616 million from health care and has savagely cut into service delivery across the Victorian hospital system. This has led to chronic shortages in the supply of doctors and nurses and the availability of beds and ambulances, which has meant a deterioration of health services overall.

Premier Baillieu blithely denies the existence of these realities. As is his wont and his administrative style, he chooses to ignore not only what he promised and guaranteed to deliver to the people of Victoria but also the consequences of his approach. He blithely ignores his responsibilities. When he is called to account, he blithely dismisses the valid concerns expressed by the Victorian people. As far back as May 2011, six months after the new government had been elected and just after its first budget had been released, the Premier was asked if he would guarantee that more elective surgeries would be delivered in Victoria than the year before. The Premier rose to his feet reluctantly and belligerently asserted that there would be more elective surgeries carried out in Victoria in 2011–12 than in 2010–11. He was extremely dismissive of the question. He blithely indicated to the chamber that there would be more elective surgery.

What is the truth? What is the undeniable truth, as attested to by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, about the number of elective surgeries during 2011–12 as compared to 2010–11? Surprise, surprise! They went down — and that will come as no surprise to the Acting President. Despite the fact the Premier had confidently asserted that there would be more elective surgeries in that year, the number went down. The facts from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicate in black and white that the number went down from 157 572 elective surgeries in Victoria in 2010–11 to 154 079 in 2011–12.

Clearly the Premier did not sufficiently care or give a damn during 2011–12 to make sure that his promise, blithely given on 25 May 2011 — that he would guarantee there would be more elective surgeries the following year — was acted upon. There are no signs that he took action at any time in 2011–12, that he gave any direction to the Minister for Health, that he monitored the performance of the health system, that he provided any injection of additional funds or that he gave any encouragement to our hospitals to deliver more services during the course of the year. There has not been one action by the Premier from May 2011 until today to turn around that sorry situation. There has not been one action the Premier, the government or Victoria's Minister for Health can point to that would indicate that the government has the slightest concern about the deterioration in the number of elective surgeries that take place in Victoria. There has not been one action the coalition has taken to provide the 800 beds it promised to deliver during its first term to the people of Victoria.

When asked to demonstrate on any number of occasions when those beds would arrive, where they have been identified and how the people of Victoria will know that they have been added to the resource allocations within hospitals in Victoria, there has not been a jot of recognition by the Premier or the Minister for Health of their obligation to meet those increased bed numbers and there has not been one indication of where those beds may be. On a number of occasions in the Parliament of Victoria the Premier has indicated that this would be reported in the annual reports of Victoria's health services. That is what the Premier blithely and dismissively indicated to the chamber. It is pretty easy to make a promise, and it is pretty easy to say, 'Yes, of course the beds are coming, and of course those beds will be reported in the annual reports'. When those 81 health service reports came out last October guess how many of them indicated that there were additional beds in Victoria? Not one of them reported additional beds. No additional beds were reported in any of the 81 health services annual reports that were tabled in the Parliament last October, despite what the Premier had indicated in his vague, dismissive and blithely given promise that those new beds would be accounted for in the annual reports. Not one bed was reported. So much for the capacity of the Premier and his Minister for Health to actually get sufficiently motivated to even ask one hospital to demonstrate that it had received one new bed.

The Premier's promise has been left hanging over his administration. The ability of the Minister for Health to deliver on what his Premier has promised has just been left hanging. You may see a pattern. These are hanging

offences by an administration. The Premier and the Minister for Health will assert to the people that they will meet their promises and assert that all will be reported and all will come good in the end, but they say it is not their responsibility. It is like they are saying a dog took their homework. They could come up with any excuse as to why they do not have to deliver, but they have not taken any action to deliver. They will not take responsibility to eyeball any citizen of Victoria and actually say, 'This is what we have delivered to you. These are the additional beds we have added. These are the additional surgeries we have funded. This is what we said we would do, and we have done it'. Between now and the election in 2014 I seriously doubt that the Premier and the Minister for Health will have the opportunity to eyeball the Victorian people and actually demonstrate to them that they have achieved any of the things they said they would set out to do.

Yesterday in the Parliament during question time I asked the Minister for Health a question about the deterioration of elective surgery waiting lists. I have to make an admission that I made a mistake in the premise of my question. I asked the Minister for Health: during the 27 months of his administration is it not a fact that on average 70 people have been added to the elective surgery waiting lists in Victoria? Here is my mistake: my assertion that the number of people added to the waiting lists was 70 was wrong; the number is 85. I confused myself because I gave the minister the benefit of the doubt that he had three additional months, but the period I should have concentrated on was the deterioration from when the government came to office in December 2010 to the situation in December 2012. On that basis I should have divided the number by 104 weeks. When you actually see that the increase in elective surgery waiting lists is 8863 and you divide that by 104 — the number of weeks in those sorry two years of David Davis's administration — the increase per week to the waiting list is 85. I stand corrected. I seriously underestimated the impact of this government on patients in Victoria, the impact upon their quality of life and the impact on their families' lives.

On average, in every single week of the first two years of David Davis's administration of the health portfolio 85 people have been added to the elective surgery waiting list. That is a diabolical situation for those people. It is a diabolical situation for their loved ones, and it is a diabolical situation for their productivity, their quality of life, the deterioration of their health, their longer rehabilitation, their comfort and their confidence to get on with their lives.

It is completely untenable for the Minister for Health to give the impression to anybody that he finds this

acceptable. I have not seen any action taken by the Minister for Health to intervene in this or actually try to remedy the situation. Where is the support he could have provided to the hospitals? Where is the support he could have provided to the doctors and nurses? Where is the comfort he could have provided to patients? In my assessment the Minister for Health has not spent 1 second on any of this, and I would be fascinated if any government member who speaks on this resolution could identify one positive action the minister has taken to turn this situation around. What positive action has the Premier taken to turn this situation around?

Time and again the Premier and the Minister for Health have tried to indicate that these are one-offs due to commonwealth funding changes that occurred in the December quarter of 2012. That is how they have tried to confuse the Victorian people. They have tried to assert that for the last four months all of the maladies within the Victorian health system have been down to the federal government adjusting its payments in December 2012.

Let us have a look. In March 2011, in the very first quarter that the Baillieu government came to office, the elective surgery waiting list had an additional 1844 people on it. That was in the very first quarter. Let us fast-track to the last five quarters. In every quarter since the December quarter of 2011, when the Victorian elective surgery waiting list got to its highest number on record, for five quarters in a row that number has kept on getting higher. For five quarters in a row, on each successive occasion, a new record for the number of people on the Victorian elective surgery waiting list has been achieved. What an appalling record, and what an appalling dereliction of responsibility by the Minister for Health in Victoria, who has tried to indicate that the deteriorating situation with the elective surgery waiting list has occurred because of a federal government funding adjustment that occurred in December 2012.

When he has been taken to task on this matter, and on the contracts he signed that actually underpin the deteriorated expectation on not only the financial position of Victorian hospitals but also their ability to deliver on surgeries and emergency department response times, in the last few days the minister has come up with a very weird concoction. He said that at the same moment he was signing off on these contracts that underpin a deteriorating position, he was actually exercising his powers as a clairvoyant to determine that in the months or perhaps the years to come there may be a federal government adjustment to funding that may mean the very contracts he is signing, at the moment he is signing them, may not be able to be delivered. That is

the construction and the absolute fantasy that the Minister for Health in Victoria is currently living out — that while he was signing those contracts he looked into his crystal ball and saw a bleak future. The bleak future he anticipated is in fact for the citizens of Victoria who have to endure his abrogation of responsibility for the Victorian health-care system.

When Victorians assess performances across our hospitals they will realise that from the first to the last quarter of this administration there has been a continual slide in the performance of the health system. The appalling response by the government to that deterioration is to blame everybody but itself for the situation and to choose to ignore the fact that the \$616 million it took out of the first two health budgets was a contributing factor. It blames the potential impact of commonwealth financial adjustments into the forward estimates period. It denies the truth and denies its responsibility for these issues.

Let us look at the statistics that were released at the end of December. As I already indicated to the chamber this morning, at the end of the July–September 2012 quarter the number of patients waiting for surgery was 47 463, which was an increase of more than 1300 patients during that quarter. During the October–December quarter the number increased to 47 760. This increase was about a third of the size of the previous quarter's increase, despite the fact that the Victorian health minister has been indicating to the Victorian people for months that the problem was caused by the commonwealth's decrease in funding in the December quarter. The facts do not hold up in relation to the increase in patients on elective surgery waiting lists or what the statistics show for the July–September 2012 quarter compared to the October–December quarter 2012 on a number of other factors.

One indicator is the proportion of ambulance patients transferred within 40 minutes, which is meant to be as high as 90 per cent. In the September quarter that figure was 74.8 per cent, a significant deterioration on the two previous quarters and a long way short of the 90 per cent target. In fact that situation improved in the December quarter; at a time when Minister Davis was creating panic across the Victorian community and blaming the federal government, that performance indicator actually improved. Another key performance indicator improved during that same quarter. In the July–September quarter only 69 per cent of emergency department category 3 patients were seen within 30 minutes. The target figure is 75 per cent, which means that more than 30 per cent of patients were not treated on time within our hospitals in the

July–September quarter. That figure improved during the course of the October–December quarter; it went to 73 per cent.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — Yes, exactly; that is right. I am in the middle of the Amazonian jungle clearing trees — left, right and centre — and not one has been noticed. Nonetheless I am undaunted by this because I am not the only lopper who is currently in action. There is lopping going on around the Parliament and the state of Victoria. In fact there is a great mood for lopping, and that will be noticed even if my contribution is not.

Before I was encouraged to be diverted by what is diverting most members of the Victorian Parliament and the Victorian community, I was noting the improvement in the response times of our emergency departments during the December quarter. Yet again the Victorian Minister for Health was, if not lying, then clearly misleading the Victorian community about the quality of the service that was being delivered by our hospitals and the impact of the federal funding adjustments that were made during the December quarter. There is a consistent pattern of misdirections that the Victorian government has tried to turn into art forms. One of these art forms that directly impacts upon its circumstances is its ability to rise to the challenge. That is a line often used by the current Premier — that he has actually been responding to challenges. That is the mood and the tone of the day, and it will probably be the public record of the day: the Premier's ability to rise to current challenges.

The Premier may succeed in one regard. One achievement that the Baillieu government has made during its first two years is to completely confuse the Victorian people about the impact of GST payments, because most people in Victoria believe — —

Mr Drum — What about waiting lists? What about ramping? You should have made that public so everyone could see what the issue was.

Mr JENNINGS — I reckon if Mr Drum had been here listening to the last 25 minutes, he would know what the cumulative issues are. He would know that from the very first quarter of the government that he is a part of — —

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — In the very first quarter there were 1844 people added to the waiting list.

Mr Drum — You had 11 years of putting people on secret waiting lists.

Mr JENNINGS — Mr Drum may be trying desperately to do something Liberal members of his coalition are not able to do. Mr Drum may be trying to divert me, but I am not going to be diverted. I am on the public record — and have been from day one in this place since becoming shadow Minister for Health — as saying that it has not been a priority of the government that Mr Drum is a part of to improve the health situation. Mr Drum and his cohorts in the coalition made promises, but not one of them has been delivered. There has not been one new bed, one reduction in the patient waiting lists for elective surgery, one reduction in emergency departments' response times or one improvement in ambulance response time figures. Not one action has been taken by the Premier or the Minister for Health to improve that situation — not one action in two years.

Instead the only successful action of the Baillieu government I can point to is its effort to confuse the Victorian people about the impact of GST adjustments, which was the point I was making before being baited by Mr Drum. I have now stopped responding to Mr Drum in the name of the aural fatigue that is being experienced by other members in the chamber.

The point I make about GST is that this year more GST revenue has come to Victoria than in any other year — not a reduction as has been indicated. There had been a reduction in the growth rate of the GST, but Victoria has received more than \$11 billion of GST payments this year, which is more than ever before. But that is not a fact known by the Victorian people, because a very successful campaign has been mounted by members of the Baillieu government based on an incorrect direction that GST revenues have dropped. That is certainly not the case.

Another misdirection by the Baillieu government has been perpetrated by the Minister for Health, who has said that there has been significant growth in the contribution of the Baillieu government to health. That is a complete misdirection. I refer the house — and I am certain that no government members would have had a look at this — to page 123 of budget paper 3 for 2012–13. There we can see what adjustments have been made to the acute hospital budget in Victoria and track how they have changed since the Baillieu government came to office.

In budget paper 3 we can see there are cumulative payments coming into the acute hospital system this year of \$7.257 billion. That is the amount going into

acute hospitals for 2012–13. Of that contribution the state of Victoria has conveyed to the Victorian community and Victorian hospitals that its contribution is \$4.009 billion with the remaining \$3.263 billion coming from the commonwealth according to a Victorian government document. That number was subject to the \$107 million adjustment infamously imposed by the commonwealth in December and then replaced in February. The commonwealth saw the error of its ways, took \$107 million out in December and put \$107 million back in in February, so the net position this year is \$3.263 billion.

Within that budget we can then have a look at how payments have increased or changed from one year to the next and the contribution of the state of Victoria compared to the commonwealth contribution. If we go back through the preceding budget papers, we will discover the state of Victoria's contribution increased during the course of 2012–13 by \$149 million — that is its increase — compared to an increase by the commonwealth over the same period of \$165 million.

If we have a look at the figures for the year before, 2011–12, and do the same calculation, we can see the contribution made by the commonwealth was \$3.099 billion and that of the Victorian government was \$3.860 billion. That amount had been increased by commonwealth payments of \$178 million over the previous year, and by Victoria of \$185 million. The trend established by those changes is that in 2011–12 almost the same increase was attributed to both the state of Victoria and to the commonwealth. By this financial year, the increase in commonwealth expenditure coming to health has exceeded the contribution made by the Victorian government.

Now let us have a look at the forward estimates — something that government members will not have done, will not do and will not bear to look at in the future, because if any of them did so they would know that the notice of motion given by the Minister for Health yesterday is a completely ridiculous motion. In accordance with his administrative style, he tries to indicate that in the forward estimates the commonwealth payments are going to reduce rather than increase, and he tries to pretend to the Victorian people that the impact of his budget cuts will not have an adverse effect on either the hospital system or on the amount of money the Baillieu government will contribute to health in the years going forward. But if we have a look at the forward estimates, as indicated on page 22 of budget paper 3 in the Victorian government's budget papers for 2012–13, we will see the Victorian increases in health funding over the next

few years are going to be the following: a \$149 million increase in 2013–14; a \$152.7 million —

Mr Leane — Acting President, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Mr JENNINGS — It is excellent that a quorum has been formed, Acting President, because it provides me with an opportunity to ensure that the correct figures are on the public record. The forward estimates on page 22 of budget paper 3 of the Victorian budget this year indicate that the increase for 2013–14 will be \$149 million. Let us compare that to the contribution to be made by the commonwealth from its midyear economic and fiscal outlook. That increase to that number by the commonwealth will be \$229 million over the current financial year. If we then project that out to the following year, 2014–15, the Victorian increase will be \$152.7 million and the commonwealth increase will be \$355.1 million. In 2015–16 the Victorian increase will be \$156.5 million and the commonwealth increase will be \$386.4 million.

Over the next three financial years the forward estimates predict the increase in Victorian funds to health will be \$458 million, and from the commonwealth it will be \$970 million. This financial year the increase is basically even between the state of Victoria and the commonwealth — in fact the commonwealth is a little bit ahead — and over the next three years the commonwealth more than doubles the increase provided by the Victorian government. The Victorian government has chosen to abrogate its responsibility to health. It is deserting funding in health. It has stripped \$616 million out of its current budget structure.

Mr Drum — No, it hasn't.

Mr JENNINGS — It absolutely has — \$616 million. In fact the forward estimates, which Mr Drum knows nothing about, show that the increase in Victoria is \$458 million, compared to the commonwealth increase of \$970 million. The Victorian contribution is less than half the contribution that is going to be coming from the commonwealth in the forward estimates. The Victorian government indicated yesterday, via the current Minister for Health, that health is a 'joint responsibility' — the first time I have ever heard him use that phrase. Why does he acknowledge that it is a joint responsibility? Because he knows that if he has any skerrick of responsibility sheeted home to him he will be caught short. He will be found wanting. He does not deliver on his

responsibilities. He does not deliver on his actions. He has misdirected the Victorian community about the amount of funding that has come into the health system under his watch. He ignores the reality of the statistics. He tries to blame the commonwealth at every turn for things he should have taken responsibility for from the day he came to office. He is a negligent minister. He is derelict in his responsibility. He is part of an administration that is floundering and failing to deliver on its promises.

Mr Drum interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! I have been exceedingly patient. I am not opposed to interjections in context, but a total barrage, as we have witnessed probably for the last 15 minutes, is inappropriate, and I ask Mr Drum to cease and desist from said interjections.

Mr JENNINGS — Thank you, Acting President, for your assistance. In fact I was actually getting a good cardio workout today. Not always would I have appreciated that, but today I do. I am actually very happy to be on the treadmill of scrutinising this government's activity to make sure that on every step along that journey the people of Victoria are not confused about who should be responsible for their health care and not confused about the fact that commonwealth payments are significantly outstripping, now and into the future, the Victorian contribution in health. The Baillieu government has shirked its responsibility to deliver on its promises. It is falling short of its commitment to the Victorian people.

If you want to have a look at what that means on the ground for patients in terms of the quality of care they are receiving, in the last week attention has been drawn to the fact that the statement of priorities that was signed by the current Minister for Health in September 2012 with Southern Health indicates that there is a deteriorating situation in Southern Health's performance targets and the amount of funds that are available to it. If you have a look at the budget that was signed off by the current health minister in September, before he used his crystal ball — his clairvoyance act — in relation to what the potential impact of commonwealth expenditure may be, you can have a look at the real number. The real number is a 2.5 per cent increase on the budget of the year before — 2.5 per cent! What health minister would be able to lift their eyes, make contact with one human being on the planet and say, 'A 2.5 per cent increase in the funding that is available to a hospital is up to scratch with meeting growth demands and CPI and is an appropriate figure to keep up with health demand expectation'?

There is no health administration on the planet that would believe that a 2.5 per cent increase is enough to keep up with demand.

That figure is clearly not enough to keep up with demand, because if you have a look at the increase that is anticipated in the elective surgery waiting list at Southern Health alone, you see that it will go from 5900 people in the first year of the Baillieu government to being in excess of 10 000 anticipated this year — 10 250. That is an increase of 4350 people.

Mr O'Donohue may say, 'Those are pretty daunting figures'. I agree with him, because that is a 73 —

Mr O'Donohue — Don't put words in my mouth.

Mr JENNINGS — No, his expression said it all. Mr O'Donohue did not say it, his expression said it.

Mr O'Donohue — On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Jennings is attributing comments or gestures to me that do not reflect my feelings.

Mrs Peulich — He is misrepresenting them.

Mr O'Donohue — He is misrepresenting them to the house.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Is the member seeking a withdrawal? I am not sure if that is appropriate, but we will give it a shot.

Mr O'Donohue — Acting President, I am seeking a withdrawal.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Mr O'Donohue has asked for a withdrawal of the comments he has heard Mr Jennings make. I ask Mr Jennings to withdraw.

Mr JENNINGS — I withdraw. I did not realise I was reflecting on Mr O'Donohue's feelings, and I would be very sorry if I had, because what I did not want to draw attention away from was the fact that there has been a 73 per cent increase in the number of people who are waiting for elective surgery at Southern Health, from 5900 people two years ago to more than 10 000 this year. That will impact on patients in Southern Health, their loved ones and their carers, and that will place stress on their lives, on the people who provide medical assistance to them, on the quality of their lives and on their productivity. That is over 10 000 people waiting under the watch of this current Minister for Health, who has added 85 people per week on average to the number of people on the elective surgery waiting list for every single tawdry week of his

administration. Every single week we have seen 85 people added to the waiting list.

It is the unfortunate truth for Victorians that when it came to office the Baillieu government promised to add to the number of beds in our hospitals; it promised to reduce waiting times not only in emergency departments but also elective surgery waiting lists. It actually said that the waiting list, at 38 000, was obscene. Now the waiting list is 47 760 and rising.

This government promised so much, but it has bitterly failed to deliver. Time and again we have seen the Minister for Health ignore his responsibilities and not take action to remedy this situation. When put upon, the Premier said there would be more hospital beds in Victoria and those numbers would be reported in annual hospital reports. They have not been reported in annual reports because they do not exist. Not one of the 81 hospital reports tabled last October demonstrated that there has been one bed added to the system by the Baillieu government — not one.

On 25 May 2011 the Premier stood up in the Legislative Assembly and said, 'Of course more elective surgery will take place in 2011–12 than in 2010–11'. He made the blithe dismissing commitment, 'Of course there will be more'. However, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare statistics show a reduction of 3000 in the number of elective surgeries paid for in the first full year of the Baillieu government compared with the year before.

That sorry story is indicative of the approach this Premier has to his administration. He dismisses any concern expressed by any citizen. He blithely ignores the existence of promises he made to the Victorian people, and he has not called upon the current Minister for Health to take action to remedy this situation and improve health care for the people of Victoria.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Government: Legislative Assembly

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. I refer to the media reports that the member for Frankston in the Assembly has resigned from the government. I invite the minister to advise the house and the Victorian community on whether the Baillieu government continues to have the confidence of the Legislative Assembly.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am a little unsettled about Mr Lenders's question from the point of view that it has been asked of the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and I am not sure that he is in a position or has a responsibility to comment on matters in the Legislative Assembly. I accept that he holds the leadership position in the government, but the question really relates to the affairs of the Legislative Assembly. I ask the member to repeat the question.

Mr LENDERS — I ask my question of the Leader of the Government in his capacity as the minister representing the Premier. I invite him to assure the house and the Victorian community that the Baillieu government still exists by virtue of it having the confidence of the Legislative Assembly, which is an absolute requirement for it to be the government of Victoria. He is the Leader of the Government.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I know Mr Davis is happy to answer Mr Lenders's question, but I rule it out because I do not believe the Leader of the Government in the upper house is competent — and I do not use that word in terms of his ability; I got into trouble with that once before because he has been too clever with that word — or in a position to comment on the Legislative Assembly and its position in terms of whether or not the government enjoys support there. I am afraid I must rule the question out.

Mr Lenders — On a point of order, President, the difficulty I have with your ruling and the reason I raise the point of order — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! A point of order is in order.

Mr Lenders — This is one of the most significant constitutional issues that faces a government and a Parliament. The President's ruling is correct in that a government is determined in the Legislative Assembly; I am not querying any of that. The point of order I raise relates to why it is appropriate for the minister representing the Premier to respond to my question. By definition, if the government is to exist, it must have the confidence of the Legislative Assembly. I argue that it is in order for me to ask a question of the minister as to whether the government still exists. I can couch that in terms other than asking him to comment on the Legislative Assembly. On the point of order, President, I request that you invite me to ask it in those terms. The question I am asking is: does the government exist, essentially? That is the nature of my question, and I think it is an appropriate question to ask the Leader of

the Government in this house who represents the Premier of Victoria.

The PRESIDENT — Order! First of all I will answer Mr Lenders's question. Yes, the government still exists. Until the other house passes a resolution to the contrary or until the Premier visits the Governor to seek the dissolution of the Parliament or such like, the government still exists, so the answer to that question is very clearly yes and does not need the Leader of the Government to respond.

I will take up the suggestion made by the member by way of a point of order.

Hon. D. M. Davis — I am happy to make a very short statement by leave if that is helpful.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I would prefer that.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) (*By leave*) — As I understand it, it is now a matter of public record that Mr Shaw, the member for Frankston in the Assembly, has resigned from the parliamentary Liberal Party. What I can indicate is that, as you have correctly alluded to, President, matters of confidence and matters of government in that respect are matters for the lower house. I can indicate that the government is very much determined to press forward. The government is very much determined to deliver for the people of Victoria.

Vocational education and training: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria report

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is directed to Mr Hall in his capacity as Minister for Higher Education and Skills. Noting that the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) has published a report commenting on the coalition government's vocational training reforms, I ask: has the minister responded to YACVic on its report, and if so, can he inform the house of the details of that response?

Hon. P. R. HALL (Minister for Higher Education and Skills) — I thank Mrs Peulich for her question on a very important matter regarding a report released by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, commonly referred to as YACVic. On 25 February YACVic released a report commenting on the impact of the changes to vocational education and training (VET) in Victoria, suggesting that some people, particularly young people, women and those living in rural and regional areas, might be adversely affected by some of those changes.

The first thing I want to say in respect of this report is that on receipt of it — and YACVic sent me a copy early in the piece — I provided a very extensive

response to YACVic on this particular matter, and that response has been published on the website alongside this report. If members want to have a look at this report, I encourage them to also look at the government response, which is extensive and published on the website alongside the report.

If you look at some of the terminology used in this report, you see the report is based on expectations rather than actual outcomes. The report makes that point quite clearly. It says, in part:

The full impacts of the recent VET changes in Victoria are still to be properly assessed ...

The report says the changes are 'expected to have' some effects and goes on to make some conclusions.

Because of the timing of the report it has failed to acknowledge some of the outcomes achieved in the first six months of the changes to vocational education and training in Victoria. In response to this report I have pointed out to YACVic, first and foremost, that more money than ever before is being applied to training subsidies in Victoria. Secondly, I reminded the council, as an organisation representing young people, that government support for training opportunities for anyone aged under 20 is unlimited. A person under 20 years of age can engage in a number of different programs and expect to receive full government support.

I also reminded the council in my response of the assistance provided to people who may be perceived as having particular learning needs by way of some of the loadings that are applied to training. These are things like the regional loading of 5 per cent, the Indigenous loading of 50 per cent and the youth loading of 30 per cent for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds who are between the ages of 15 and 19.

What has this done to assist young people accessing training? I can advise the house that in a comparison of the 2012 outcomes, six months of data of which is structured around the new training arrangements, we find that participation in government-funded vocational training in all age groups increased in 2012, but for students aged between 15 to 19 years that growth has been 11 per cent. Young people are still engaging in training at an increasing rate, more than ever before.

In terms of people who are disadvantaged, I reminded the house a fortnight ago that there has been an 11 per cent increase in participation by people from Indigenous backgrounds in the last 12 months, for people with a disability there has been an increase of 18 per cent and for people from culturally and

linguistically diverse backgrounds a 30 per cent increase. Every single region has seen an increase in participation and training.

This report is based on expectations rather than actual outcomes, and I suggest that people need to read my response alongside that report to get a true and accurate picture of the state of training in Victoria.

Government: Legislative Assembly

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My question is for the Leader of the Government in his capacity of representing the Premier and in his own capacity. I ask: can the minister advise the house whether the member for Frankston in the Assembly has guaranteed the government that he will continue to support the government on matters of supply and confidence?

Mr P. Davis — On a point of order, President, in framing my point of order I take note of your earlier comment, which was that matters relating to the government and the formation of the government are matters for the Assembly. It is a matter for this house to hold government ministers to account through question time and other forums, but it is not for this house to discuss matters relating to the formation of government in the Assembly, and those matters will be dealt with at another time in the Assembly.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — On the point of order, President, Minister Davis, apart from being the Minister for Health and a minister of this chamber, is the Leader of the Government and represents the Premier. My question to him was not about what might happen in the Assembly; it was about what undertakings may or may not have been given by the member for Frankston to the government. I submit to you that in that respect the question is completely in order.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On the point of order, President, the point made by Mr Philip Davis is correct. The undertakings in the Assembly, the procedures and so forth are matters for the Assembly. Obviously the government has a view on things, but in these matters the two houses very jealously regard their separate roles and respect their separate roles. Our house is a house of review, as you understand, and a house that is designed to hold government to account, but the lower house is the house in which government is formed.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I see a distinction between the question asked by Mr Lenders and the question asked by Mr Pakula. My view is that Mr Pakula has specifically asked about any

undertakings given to the government as distinct from any undertakings given to the Premier, and I think that is a very important distinction in terms of his question. The question asked by Mr Pakula would certainly be a legitimate question to ask the Premier in the Legislative Assembly.

Mr Drum — You'll be able to ask it soon.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Mr Drum

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Drum will withdraw from the chamber for 15 minutes.

Mr Drum withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Government: Legislative Assembly

Questions resumed.

The PRESIDENT — Order! This is a serious matter which needs the serious attention of all members. Mr Davis represents the Premier in this house. If the question is a legitimate one to the Premier in the lower house, then I think Mr Pakula's question is in order. I base that on the fact that the question is about undertakings to the government as distinct from any office-bearers within the Legislative Assembly, and is therefore a legitimate question to ask Mr Davis. But of course it is quite within the rights of the minister to say that he has no knowledge of such matters because discussions in respect of the government's position may well have been held in another place and he may not have not been party to them. I will allow the question on this occasion. As I said, I see a distinction between this question and the question asked by Mr Lenders.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I can inform the house that this is obviously a very recent development and I am not aware of any such undertaking.

Mildura Base Hospital: future

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Health, Mr David Davis. Can the minister inform the house of any recent appointments to the Mildura Base Hospital community advisory board and of the recent activities of the Reclaim the Mildura Base Hospital pressure group and its tactics?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for her question and for her strong advocacy for hospitals and health services in her region, in particular the Mildura Base Hospital. I can inform the house today that Dr Fiona Wright has been appointed to the community advisory board at the Mildura Base Hospital. She is a very appropriate appointee; She holds the position of associate professor and director of the Mildura Regional Clinical School in the school of rural health, which is part of the faculty of medicine, nursing and health sciences at Monash University.

It is critical that the clinical position be strongly represented on the board. This appointment will enable stronger representation of health and other professionals who work at the hospital. It will also ensure that there is a strong link to the school of rural health. The strengthening of those links will enable the very important task of bringing health professionals to the hospital from intrastate, interstate and overseas. The training circuits undertaken by many of our medical practitioners in the early days of their careers include very important internships. Other roles are strengthened by this important link.

I am very aware of the activities of Reclaim the Mildura Base Hospital group and welcome its community advocacy. It has every right to its views and to put those views strongly to government. I note its activities over the last 11 years of the Labor government were much quieter — —

Mr Viney — On a point of order, President, I am just not sure whether this question is in order in the way it was structured. The minister is now answering what appear to be two quite separate questions: one was about appointments to the board and the other was about the activities of a community organisation. The minister has gone from one part of the question to the other; there appears to be no link. I cannot see how that question can be in order, let alone the particular way the minister is answering it.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The question is obviously in order. If it had not been in order, I would have ruled it out when it was asked. The Deputy President would be aware that ministers are entitled to answer a question as they see fit; I am not in a position to direct ministers on the way in which they should answer a question. Mr Davis is addressing matters that he sees as being pertinent to the question asked by Mrs Petrovich. My concern would be if the minister were to get to a point where he was debating his answer; that is when I would have concern.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — As the question indicated, I was asked about recent activities of this particular community group in Mildura. I can indicate to the chamber that I have met with that group on several occasions. I have also met with the community advisory board. I pay tribute to the work of community groups that are prepared to advocate very strongly. I note the government's decision to put more money into Mildura hospital, including additional cancer and oncology services. I am very proud to have been in Mildura to make that announcement and to indicate that we are strongly supportive of the hospital and the services it delivers to the community. It is absolutely critical that the best services are provided. That is why I am pleased with the appointment of Dr Wright to that board.

It is with some concern that I read the minutes of the Reclaim the Mildura Base Hospital group's meeting of 5 September 2012. I note the decision recorded in these minutes — and I can only take the minutes at face value:

Jill and Robert? are to meet with Kieran —

I take that to be Kieran Iles —

at SD —

Sunraysia Daily —

to confirm media message.

I can indicate very clearly that it is important that senior journalists of newspapers act independently and without fear or favour, in a way that sees — —

Ms Broad — On a point of order, President, the Leader of the Government is now moving right along from responding to a question about government administration to lecturing the media and in particular the editor of a newspaper about their responsibilities. I would suggest to you that this is not a matter of government administration.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I would have some sympathy with the point of order if the minister were to continue to talk about external meetings that he is not a party to. I accept the answer up to this point on the basis that the minister has been talking about community groups, but I think he would be on safer ground if he were to talk about his own meetings with the group rather than meetings that some people associated with the community might have had with local media or other parties, given that he was not at those meetings.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — It is important that groups are able to put their case to government and to the

community in a clear and frank way. It is also important that that is reported in a fearless and frank way and in a way that does not in any way compromise the independence of the reporting of those media outlets.

I also make the very strong point that the board has a strong advocacy role. We are certainly prepared to work with the board to strengthen that advocacy role. The negotiations that are proceeding are important ones, and we are determined to deliver on the election commitments to expand the Mildura hospital. I note that for over 11 years Labor did nothing to return the hospital to public ownership. The then Minister for Health, now the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, had that opportunity; he did not do so, including part of the negotiating — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Planning: Brunswick terminal station

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. I refer to the development of the Brunswick terminal station. Some 12 months ago, just as the matter was heading for the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) in the face of local community and council opposition, the minister intervened to approve the terminal upgrade. There is considerable community concern about the health impact that a fourfold increase in power transmission will have. Members of the local community want to meet with the minister. They want an independent review and an assurance that their health and the health of their children will not be compromised. The local community and the council have documented 20 unsuccessful attempts to meet with either the minister or the Premier. Members of the community are here today. Will the minister meet with them?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mr Tee for his question, and I notice he has come back for seconds after his efforts yesterday. There is a simple response to this whole issue — that is, that the upgrade to the Brunswick terminal station, which, I might point out, I live near, has in fact met the guidelines of the federal Labor government. If Mr Tee wants to recommend that people meet and have discussions about the Brunswick terminal station, he might also want to recommend that they chat to the federal Labor government. The decision on the Brunswick terminal station is one that will guarantee supply for Melbourne's central business district. It is essential.

There is already a terminal station at that location. Mr Tee may not know the site. I do; I cycle past it regularly. I have been a resident in that area of

Melbourne for many years. Mr Tee has not. I can inform the house that I have no qualms about the intent of the government to ensure that electricity supply is preserved and that the regulations put in place by the federal Labor government have been adhered to.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his response. As I indicated to him in my substantive question, the community's concerns relate to the failure of this matter to go to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the failure of any independent oversight. If the minister is so confident, if this matter is as simple as he suggested it is, why will he not take the time today to meet with the community?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — It has to be remembered that the incorporated document I have approved will meet National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines and Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency standards. It is in accordance with the incorporated document permits that we have issued and the setbacks are greater than currently exist. Mr Tee may not know that I have met with people.

Mr Tee interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — Does Mr Tee know my diary better than me? Good one, mate; nice try!

The PRESIDENT — Order!

Hon. M. J. GUY — I am sorry; Mr Tee knows my diary better than me. There is no use having a conversation because Poindexter thinks he knows it better than me!

Mars Australia: Ballarat

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, the Honourable Richard Dalla-Riva. Can the minister update the house on any new food manufacturing advances in regional Victoria?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade) — I thank the member for his question. On 28 February Mr Ramsay, the Premier and I attended an event in Ballarat to announce the extension of the Mars Australia site, a \$52 million expansion of its food manufacturing chocolate facility. Opening a facility such as the Mars site in Ballarat is one of those jobs, Mr Pakula, that you actually do enjoy going to. There were a great many people in attendance. Mars Australia in Ballarat will

continue to manufacture Mars Bars, Snickers, M&M's and other popular products. The commitment we have provided — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — I know members opposite are all excited; they must be on a sugar boost. This expansion will generate more construction jobs in Ballarat and will secure the existing jobs at the facility. For the information of Mr Ramsay and the chamber, the great news is that the plant will now be able to produce 4.7 billion Malteser balls annually. What a great news story to have that many Malteser balls created. I repeat: 4.7 billion Maltesers per annum. I did try a few Maltesers there, and if members have a look at the front cover of the Ballarat *Courier*, they will see a photo of us at the site. The expansion will generate 100 new jobs in the construction stage and secure the existing full-time jobs.

We have always said that it is important that manufacturers, be it in whatever industry, have opportunities to expand into export markets. The production line upgrades we have provided in our co-contribution to Mars will ensure that not only will there be an increase in Malteser balls but there will be an increase in the primary bar production line and the bite-sized production line. That will enable Mars to cater for the export market, because that is clearly where we have a competitive advantage in the food industry. That is why we have committed to the super trade mission. That is why we have supported companies, through our manufacturing strategy, to expand into new and emerging markets.

This is a great news story, and I was pleased Mr Ramsay was there. We had a great day sharing a great outcome with the community. I look forward to Mars continuing to expand its facility and its development of new and emerging markets not only around Australia but the rest of the world.

Aged care: funding

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Ageing. In a remarkable coincidence, after the leaking of the Vertigan report that recommended the state government vacate the field of public aged care entirely, the 2012–13 Victorian government budget update foreshadowed a massive \$75 million cut in the forward estimates in respect of the provision of public aged-care services. The budget update refers to:

... a reallocation of government managed aged-care places to non-government providers in the metropolitan area ...

Why does the minister not support public aged care in the Melbourne metropolitan area?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Ageing) — I thank the member for her question and indicate that the government does support a range of aged-care provision — public, private and not-for-profit. The member has asked questions in this chamber before on similar matters. She initially accused me of not supporting public aged care at all. I carefully pointed out to her that the government had put money into a number of locations to indicate clearly that the government had some spending priorities in some of those areas.

She asked another question about Peninsula Health. I can indicate to her that the steps taken by Peninsula Health to provide a partnership with Southern Cross Care have been very successful in delivering what both Peninsula Health and Southern Cross Care believe will be a better provision of aged-care services for people on the peninsula. That was through an expression-of-interest process that was able to see a long-term future provided in a way that will service the people on the peninsula.

The government is prepared to look at options, to make decisions in the interests of communities and to ensure that good outcomes occur in respect of aged-care services, and it will do so in the community's interests.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — The minister has clearly failed to give any guarantee that he will be retaining the same number of beds in local communities or even keeping facilities operating at all in a particular local community. He mentioned Peninsula Health, so I draw the minister's attention to Carinya Nursing Home in Frankston. Will the minister be able to give a guarantee to that community that it will retain its public aged-care beds and in fact remain a public facility when \$75 million is ripped out of the public aged-care budget?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Ageing) — I can indicate that Peninsula Health went through a process of looking at the best provision of aged-care services that was available. It made some decisions about aged-care provision and went through an expression-of-interest process. It moved a number of aged-care beds out to Southern Cross Care, a not-for-profit group that seemed to be able to provide a better service — a service that more adequately reflected the needs of the community. That is a model that is entirely appropriate for health services. The

government will not oppose health services taking those sorts of steps. The government is interested to see that there is a range of services provided in particular regions.

Aviation industry: achievements

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My question this afternoon is for the Minister responsible for the Aviation Industry, the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips. I ask the minister if he could inform the house of any recent events that highlight the diversity of Victoria's aviation industry.

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Minister responsible for the Aviation Industry) — I thank Mr Ondarchie for his question and for his ongoing interest in the Victorian aviation and aerospace industries. As Mr Ondarchie highlights in his question, we have an incredibly diverse industry sector here in Victoria. It is something this government is committed to growing, working with and seeing prosper in years to come.

The industry sector spans areas such as manufacturing, and I know my colleague the Honourable Richard Dalla-Riva, the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, has great interest in and great engagement with that area. We have companies as diverse as Boeing Aerostructures Australia, which manufactures 787 and 737 components in Port Melbourne; Mahindra Aerospace in Latrobe Valley, which is building the GA8 Airvan and is soon to expand into the GA10 and GA18 twin turbo-prop; Marand engineering; and RUAG-Rosebank Engineering Australia, which is building components for the joint strike fighter program in the United States.

In the area of airlines we have companies such as Tiger Airways based in Victoria and companies like Jetstar, a great Victorian airline success story — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am sorry to interrupt the minister, and this is a bit unusual, but I seek an assurance from Mr Campbell, who is in the gallery, that he is not taking photos. I would prefer our guests in the Parliament not to be fiddling with their mobile phones. If they are interested in being in the chamber, then I presume they are interested in the proceedings of the chamber.

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — I will leave the prospect of photographs being taken alone.

As I was saying, we have great diversity in the aviation and aerospace sector here in Victoria, including the Tiger and Jetstar airlines. At a time when New South

Wales is continuing a four-decade debate on whether to have a second airport, we already have Melbourne Airport, which is a 24-hour curfew-free international airport, and of course we have Avalon Airport, which is also a 24-hour curfew-free airport. It is currently taking domestic services and is soon to take international services.

In the training area we have institutions such as RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology making major contributions in aviation and aerospace training. We have companies such as CAE Oxford Aviation Academy, the largest flying training provider in the world, based here and operating out of Melbourne, and we have Singapore Technologies Aerospace Academy at Ballarat and Moorabbin Flight Training Academy at Mangalore. They are all making major contributions to the export market in aviation training. We also have major service providers — companies like Airbiz and Rehbein Airport Consulting — providing aviation services both domestically and internationally. We have a diverse aviation and aerospace market here in Victoria.

Last Monday I was delighted, as part of the Australian International Airshow, to launch the first Asia-Pacific Aviation/Aerospace Leaders Summit, which was an initiative of Aviation/Aerospace Australia, which the Victorian government was delighted to support in 2010. Aviation/Aerospace Australia was formed under the leadership of John Duddy, the chairman, and Jim Carden, the chief executive officer, to act as a peak organisation for Australia's aviation and aerospace industry.

The leaders summit last week brought together around 100 chief executives and senior executives of regulators. We had representations from the safety director of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and the chief executive of Airservices Australia. We had chief executives from companies and institutions throughout the Asia-Pacific region — around 100 in total — visiting Melbourne last week for the leaders summit and the leaders dialogue. That highlights the strength and the attraction of the Victorian aviation and aerospace sector. It is something the Victorian government is delighted to support. We look forward to the leaders forum being an annual event. This year's event was the inaugural event. I am confident that with the leadership provided by Aviation/Aerospace Australia we will see this become an annual event, which will further reinforce the strength of Victoria's and Australia's aviation and aerospace sectors.

Aged care: funding

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Ageing. The minister's so-called reallocation of public aged-care beds to the private system will also see the loss of patient ratios that only apply to the public aged-care system. Is this the minister's attempt to do something in aged care that he was not able to achieve in the hospital system?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Ageing) — I thank the member for her question. She has not read the nursing enterprise bargaining agreement to see that there is a reallocation of nursing ratios in that agreement. There has been a movement of nursing ratios from a fixed point of time to an averaging over 28 days, which is a great quality and safety measure enabling better matching of resources to patient acuity and thereby providing better quality service. The provision of quality service is the key focus for the government with aged care. We want to see a diverse system that is able to provide the best possible outcome for Victorians.

Aged-care funding is of course largely a commonwealth responsibility, but the state also assists. I note the decision of the federal Minister for Mental Health and Ageing in his Living Longer, Living Better proposal and that he is seeking, with the support of other members of the commonwealth government, to impose a series of union-style restrictions on aged care across the country. What is required here is a system that will deliver better quality and better outcomes for patients and a focus on the best results for patients rather than simply delivering union featherbedding or increases in the funding to unions through forced arrangements. The fact is that the commonwealth ought not be attaching strings of this type unless they are directly linked and shown to be linked to quality and safety. It is not appropriate to simply link union membership in some way to these arrangements.

I note an article in the *Australian* yesterday, which I think sums it up. It said it would let the unions in. If the purpose of the federal government's steps is to let in the unions, that is concerning. If the purpose and tests that are applied are actually about improving quality and safety for patients, that is very appropriate and is where the focus should be. I fear that what is going on here is not as focused on that second point as it should be.

It is important to understand that we have significant growth in the population of aged people across Australia, including in Victoria, and that is going to grow as time goes forward. We need an affordable high-quality aged-care service system that has diversity

and that enables choice for families and those who wish to access aged care. It would not be improved if the tests that are applied to enable additional support include simply a straightforward forcing of union membership. If the tests that are applied are about quality and safety, that is much more appropriate.

There has to be a very clear set of steps taken by the federal government. In my view there has been insufficient consultation on this matter with the states and the private sector. There needs to be greater consultation. There needs to be a greater understanding that we cannot force the costs of aged care up without a commensurate increase in quality and outcomes for the patients who are in residential aged care. The focus of the commonwealth package is not yet as sharply refined as it should be.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — It is interesting that the minister regards patient ratios as featherbedding, to use his words — —

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — Those are exactly the words the minister used.

Hon. D. M. Davis — That is not actually what I said. There were two separate contexts.

Ms MIKAKOS — My supplementary question is: what advice has the minister's department provided him with as to the anticipated job losses that will flow from this massive funding cut and the minister's intention to implement the removal of the ratios?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Ageing) — I think Ms Mikakos is confusing several things here. There will be increasing employment for nursing staff in our public hospitals. The only reductions in staff presence in our public hospitals that have occurred recently, or are likely to occur in the future, are due to the commonwealth government's cuts.

As we saw when the \$107 million cut was applied this year, hospitals were able to hire fewer nursing staff than they would otherwise have been able to do. I make the point that although the \$107 million is about to come back through a convoluted mechanism — we are hopeful it will come back — —

Mr Jennings interjected.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — The point here is that we are still to see what is going to happen with the

\$368 million over the next three years, including the \$100 million that the commonwealth is ripping out. That is what will reduce the employment of nurses and other staff in our system. It is the decision of the commonwealth to cut money.

Planning: Pakenham

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. Can the minister advise the house what action the Baillieu government has taken to bring forward new jobs and investment to Melbourne's fast-growing Pakenham corridor?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mr O'Donohue for a question on my birthday today in relation to a very serious issue that he and I and the Speaker in the Legislative Assembly, Ken Smith — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. M. J. GUY — Do you want me to refer to an old Ukrainian saying about bulls running rampant at the gates? I could use that to refer to members of the opposition.

This is a very serious matter about jobs in Melbourne's growth areas. It should be remembered that the Baillieu government is doing all it can to ensure that we put in place a metropolitan planning policy that will bring jobs to Melbourne's growth areas.

Last week I had the pleasure to be with Mr O'Donohue and Mr Smith, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the member for Bass in the Assembly, to announce a major expansion of O'Connor's abattoir in Pakenham. This facility is a \$315 million expansion of an existing abattoir on the south side of Pakenham that will bring 800 local jobs to the Pakenham growth corridor. This is exceedingly important — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — Mr Barber may oppose it, and the Greens may oppose progress. He might want us all to live in humpies, but on this side of the house we believe in jobs. We believe in providing incentives for jobs and bringing forward planning outcomes that provide incentives for jobs. We believe in doing the right things for the people of Melbourne's south-eastern growth corridor. That is why I had much pleasure in joining Mr O'Donohue and Mr Smith to make this announcement with the management of O'Connor's in Pakenham. This will be a major expansion through the C176 planning scheme approval to ensure that Melbourne's outer south-east has access to

good-quality jobs for the long term for the many thousands of people who are going to live in that corridor.

What we are seeing in Melbourne's south-east is the manifestation of a lot of planning and growth over a number of years. The Baillieu government is ensuring that the jobs are there to match that residential growth. Under the previous government that policy was not there. Under that government we simply had the approval of structure plans without jobs and employment strategies to match. The Baillieu government has ensured that that is not going to be the case. We will make sure that good jobs are there for the future, and that is why we are very proud to have approved this planning scheme amendment.

HOSPITALS: WAITING LISTS

Debate resumed.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to speak to the debate on Mr Jennings's motion, which he brought to the chamber earlier this morning. The motion states:

That this house notes —

- (1) that when the Baillieu government came to office the waiting list for elective surgery was 38 897;
- (2) with dismay, on behalf of Victorian patients, that for the last five quarters in a row, elective surgery waiting lists have been on each successive occasion the highest ever recorded in Victoria with the most recent list showing the number of patients waiting is now at an appalling and unacceptable record high of 47 760;

and calls on the Baillieu government to restore sufficient Victorian funding to our health services to enable them to reduce waiting lists for elective surgery to at least the same number of people who were on the list at the time of the election in 2010.

That brings me to my opening point, which concerns what the coalition did when it came to government in 2010. Health services in this state were left in an absolute shemozzle by the former Minister for Health, the now Leader of the Opposition, Mr Andrews. I remind the chamber that when we came to government, we found that there was an unfunded completion cost of \$44 million for the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre, which was an extraordinary oversight. I do not know whether this was due to poor planning, but it illustrates the former Labor government's legacy of mismanagement of projects.

A fit-out for essential information and communications technology services at the Royal Children's Hospital

which cost \$25 million was unfunded. IT services were not included in the forward planning for a new hospital costing \$1 billion. That was either an extraordinary oversight or mismanagement. As Victorians we are all very proud of the new hospital, and it does an extraordinary job in servicing the needs of Victorian children and those from interstate. However, it is unbelievable that there was no IT component in funding for the hospital.

Those are just two of the issues that we found in relation to funding for health services. We also discovered that \$55.2 million in Christmas salaries were unfunded. There was no source of funding for staff salaries over that period of 2010–11. That is again an extraordinary finding. A new government expects these payments to be in place. It assumes that the salaries of staff will be available for the Christmas–New Year period, but that was not the case. We had to find \$55.2 million. Mr Lenders was the Treasurer at the time, so he would have had a fair bit to do with the funding of these areas, which we as a government had to address. Those are just some of the legacies we found in health.

As we know, there were significant black holes in other government portfolios such as transport. There was HealthSMART in health, there was the myki ticketing fiasco and there were significant blow-outs on projects right across the board. This government has worked extremely hard to put Victoria back on a sustainable footing to meet commitments such as funding significant infrastructure for the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre and putting IT systems into our brand-new Royal Children's Hospital.

I also want to refer to other issues that were more well known in the lead-up to the 2010 election. This concerns statistics, so it goes to the heart of Mr Jennings's motion. In the Auditor-General's *Access to Public Hospitals — Measuring Performance* report, handed down in 2009, there was an extraordinary finding in relation to data manipulation. The report confirmed that data manipulation occurred. The foreword of the report states:

much more worrying were instances of admitted data manipulation to meet indicator targets. This is highly improper ...

On page 5 the audit summary states:

These conditions have opened the way for inappropriate practices such as data manipulation, which undermine the integrity of hospital performance monitoring.

The conclusion of the report on page 51, states:

Our conclusion is that data manipulation did occur at this hospital, based not only on the hospital's admission of retrospective changes of data by a few minutes in order to meet the indicator, but also on the results of the medical record audit.

Mr Jennings talks about what this government is doing in relation to statistics and what it has to deal with, but the former government does not have a record to boast about. Unfunded projects and the cover-up and manipulation of data are damning findings. As soon as we came to government we looked at these issues and addressed them. One of the first things the minister did was to create a health services plan. He consulted with people within the health industry, including stakeholders and those at the coalface, such as practitioners and clinicians, those in the public health sector and those in community health. The health services plan, whether it concerns the needs of Melburnians or those in regional Victoria, sets out a comprehensive and clear plan to address this state's many needs, which includes new capital programs. I will run through some of those in a minute.

There is no doubt that we knew what we were coming into in relation to the underfunding, and I have to say the absolute disregard of many areas of regional Victoria. I understand regional Victoria extremely well, because I lived and grew up in a regional area in my younger years. I worked in a health service in far western Victoria, so I understand the needs of those local communities, and I understand those health services and their needs. As many members know, I have also worked in some of our major health institutions in metropolitan Melbourne, including the Alfred hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital, as it was then known. Those two health services provide services in not only metropolitan Melbourne but also wider Victoria and interstate. They provide an extraordinary service.

With all due respect, I have to say to Mr Jennings that I am not sure that he understands the complexities of how large health services operate and the extraordinary challenges they face not only on a daily or hourly basis but almost on a minute-by-minute basis in many instances in some of the larger institutions. Those challenges are at times critical and very complex. However, I have to give Mr Jennings some credit, because I think he has much more of an understanding of Victorian health services than his federal counterparts Prime Minister Julia Gillard, federal Minister for Health Tanya Plibersek and Treasurer Wayne Swan, who, in his appalling and disgraceful manipulation of population data, showed what he truly thought of Victoria and Victorian patients.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Ms CROZIER — As Mr Lenders well knows, Victorian patients understand that the federal government's \$107 million funding cutbacks — that is, the money it ripped out of Victorian health services — went to the core of patient services. Patient services include a range of things. They are not just to do with operations and outpatient clinics; they include the running of major institutions, community health programs and many other things.

This motion talks about elective surgery waiting lists, and it goes to the heart of that issue. Elective surgery waiting lists have been impacted on significantly by the federal Labor cuts. It is extraordinary to think that a government could cut a budget after it had been agreed to and signed off on. Hospitals work within budget frameworks, and the federal government's cutting of that funding midway through its budget is an extraordinary approach to take. It is an approach we have seen with the recent announcement of the restoration of about \$107 million to Victorian health services, although that happened in a punitive manner, I have to say — —

Mr Lenders interjected.

Ms CROZIER — It has been done in a very punitive manner. Mr Lenders knows that the letter the Prime Minister wrote to the Premier in which she talked about the Premier was disingenuous. I do not think she has very much credibility at all in relation to this issue. She and Minister Plibersek have absolutely been shown up. I want to congratulate our Minister for Health on taking the fight up to the Prime Minister and the federal Minister for Health and arguing for that to be restored — —

Mr O'Brien — It was a backflip.

Ms CROZIER — It was a massive backflip.

Mr Drum — There was no help from state Labor members.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Drum is absolutely right. Those opposite did not argue the case for Victorian patients. They sat there silently. One would have to assume that they supported their federal counterparts in ripping \$107 million out of Victorian health services. Victorian Labor members should be condemned for their lack of action in not contacting their federal counterparts. It is a disgrace.

While I am on that, I refer to those disingenuous advertisements the federal government wasted

taxpayers money on in the weekend papers some weeks ago; I believe that advertising is rolling on. That money should have been directed to health services rather than to a blatant campaign that is absolutely untrue. If we are talking about disingenuity, that is a very disingenuous advertising campaign.

The federal government is pretty good at wasting money; we have seen what it has done. It has wasted money on pink batts, school halls — you name it. It loves spending money. It does not know how to save; it has absolutely no idea. It is wasteful in management and wasteful in money matters. Australians and Victorians alike know what the federal government is doing — —

Mr Lenders interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I ask Mr Lenders to refrain from interjecting and allow Ms Crozier to finish her contribution before lunch.

Ms Hartland interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I did not hear Ms Hartland's interjection, but I do not think it was favourable.

I will return to the motion. The federal government has been absolutely shown up by its actions. Victorian patients, but more importantly Victorian health services, know what they have done. As I said, budgets had been set. Those health services were working towards those budgets and managing their services, and as anyone who has worked in health services — —

Mr Lenders — Your heart is not in this.

Ms CROZIER — I say to Mr Lenders that my heart is in this, because I have worked directly in health services, and I absolutely understand the difficulties they face on a daily basis.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

Ms CROZIER — I am pleased to return to this very important motion of Mr Jennings.

Mr O'Brien — As are we.

Ms CROZIER — I thank Mr O'Brien. Before the lunch break I was speaking of the significant legacy left by Labor that we are continuing to deal with. In the area of health there is no doubt that the minister has made significant inroads into fixing some of the problems that we found when we came into office in relation to the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre, the IT infrastructure shortfall at the Royal Children's

Hospital and the extraordinary finding of unfunded salaries for the Christmas-New Year period. As somebody who has worked at the coalface as a clinician, I am not sure what the staff would have done if they knew that their salaries were not funded throughout the Christmas holiday period. I have to ask what their union did about that. Did it even comment on it? It was an appalling state. The union did absolutely nothing about the fundamental rights of the clinicians, practitioners and health workers across the state, and that is extraordinary. It is indicative of the leadership of unions that they take a stance only when it suits their own needs. The Minister for Health should be congratulated for the stance he took to remedy those areas, as should the Premier and the Treasurer, because they had to find the funds.

When we came to office we had to deal not only with those issues but also with the huge \$6.1 billion of GST revenue that was ripped out from beneath us by the federal government. We also have a carbon tax; unfortunately Mr Finn is not here, but I am sure he would have something to say about that. Those costs go to the bottom line and affect the running of health services and hospitals, and that goes to the heart of Mr Jennings's motion regarding waiting lists and elective surgery, and I will return to that in a minute.

Whether it is because of the impost of the carbon tax, the GST revenue being ripped out of the state or, as we saw last November, the reduction of \$107 million to Victorian health services, those costs have an enormous impact. They impact on patients who require health services, whether they are situated in Bentleigh or Oakleigh and need to access the Monash Medical Centre — an extraordinarily good, world-class health facility that services many people from my electorate and around the state — or whether they are in Prahran and need to access the Alfred hospital. Those patients need reassurance, and the minister has fought very hard for Victorian patients in relation to the federal health cuts.

Certainly those clinicians, as well as the staff in the administrative arms of those health services, fully understand what the federal government did. The ads the federal government tried to put in place and the backflips did not cut it, because people knew that the federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan, needed to fix his financial black hole. The federal government is very good at creating black holes. It wasted an enormous amount of money through various programs and the federal Treasurer needed to find that money. Taking \$107 million directly out of Victorian health services was absolutely disgraceful, but I think he has been shown up for the standards that he adopts, along with

his colleague Ms Plibersek, the federal Minister for Health.

It is clear that the Minister for Health, David Davis, has led the way in fighting for Victorian patients, and many other states have followed his lead and come on board. I know that there was agreement among state ministers that they felt these cuts were unnecessary, and that includes two Labor ministers as well.

Those opposite talk about the Victorian coalition government taking \$616 million from health services. There is no doubt that was undertaken, and Mr Davis has been up-front about looking at the readjustment of finances in relation to health, but we must remember that this was done in relation to reducing waste. During the last sitting week I spoke about aspects of Health Purchasing Victoria, which has become more efficient. This government has made headway in improving efficiencies, getting money back into front-line services and supporting clinicians to enable Victorian patients to be treated.

As I said, health is an extremely complex and challenging area — there is no doubt about that — but it needs to have some certainty and surety in terms of budgets, and to have money ripped out halfway through a budget cycle is extraordinary to say the least.

I want to make another point in relation to Mr Jennings's motion and to reassure the chamber and any people listening — I am pleased to see some members of the opposition here; after all, it is their motion — that the Victorian coalition government has increased health funding by \$1.3 billion since coming to office to a record \$13.7 billion — —

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Ms CROZIER — As Ms Mikakos knows, the former member for Lyndhurst in the Assembly pulled the plug a few weeks ago, so why did he go? You have caused a number of by-elections right across the — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I ask members to reduce the interjections, and I ask the member to stay on the topic.

Ms CROZIER — Thank you, Deputy President. Returning to Mr Jennings's motion, I reiterate that since coming to office the coalition government has increased health funding by \$1.3 billion, to a record \$13.7 billion. It is a significant figure despite, as I mentioned, those imposts we have had at a national level, including a reduction in GST revenue and the carbon tax, let alone the \$107 million taken out of Victorian health funding last November which has now been restored.

There is no doubt that state budget funding for hospitals has increased since the coalition government was elected. We are putting more into hospital services, taking note that this state had an increase in population in the period between the former government being elected in 1999 and our coming to office. The preposterous assumption that our population had decreased, as was asserted by the federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan, is just extraordinary. We have taken note that our population is increasing, and we are working towards managing that in terms of planning in all sorts of areas, of which health is just one area.

There has been significant spending on infrastructure to cope with this population increase. The coalition government is looking to address the shortfalls in the areas of education and transport. Very little was done by the former government to address an increasing Victorian population which requires services. For those opposite to come in here making demands and saying that this or that has not been done is extraordinary considering the legacy they left us, including a lack of planning and, more to the point, a lack of detail in much of the planning that was done. Victorians should be reminded of these challenges, because they are the ones we faced when we came to government.

In 2011 the Labor government let \$30 million of elective surgery funding lapse, which had a significant impact on our elective surgery lists. The federal government has also discontinued a key component of the national partnership agreement on improving hospital services, which resulted in a \$50 million reduction in federal funding for elective surgery and emergency department activity.

Anyone who knows about or who has worked in emergency departments will understand how busy those departments can be. Very often there might also be a lot of minor cases. For example, there could be significant activity on weekend nights due to more car accidents or incidents of alcohol-fuelled violence, or any of those issues that we think as a collective we want to address and reduce in number. However, there are peaks and troughs in emergency departments, and they often find themselves in fluid situations, such as when they deal with critical incidents, minor situations, triaging and sorting matters out when patients present in various areas. Emergency departments are extraordinarily busy areas, and obviously there will be increased demands made of these emergency departments because of an increase in population. Naturally an increase in population is going to mean an increase in activity. I find some of the federal regulations extraordinary, particularly the 4-hour rule — that is, that patients must be admitted to the

hospital or referred within 4 hours of arrival at an emergency department so hospitals can churn people through and out.

Mr O'Brien — Wayne Swan said the population is decreasing.

Ms CROZIER — Poor Mr Swan. His figures are pretty questionable at times, and his figures showing a population decrease were an extraordinary presumption. I think he has been shown up and people can see how ridiculous that notion is.

As I said, the population of Victoria has been increasing for years. The subject of the manipulation of federal funding to Victorian health services using false data reminds me that before lunch I was talking about the manipulation of data under the former state government in 2009 when the then Auditor-General handed down a report on public hospitals. That report showed the manipulation of data by the former government and exactly what members of that government had done. This just goes to show that a leopard does not change its spots, because that is what is happening at a federal level now — the manipulation of data. Trying to argue that Victoria's population had decreased was just ridiculous.

To return to my point about the national partnership agreement component and the federal Labor government discontinuing a key component of that, at the time that was done the Victorian coalition government warned that the national partnership agreement cut would create a shortfall of over 7000 elective surgeries in Victoria alone. There is no doubt that that is a significant figure. When we think of those 7000 people on waiting lists, we realise it is a significant figure. Patients may be waiting for minor surgery but very often it is major in their eyes. Although it may not have been categorised as major surgery, for many patients their surgery is major. Having some 7000 people on waiting lists is a significant number and we have to face up to and deal with it, and I think the minister is addressing that.

The federal health cuts have impacted on elective surgery waiting lists; there is no doubt about that. When \$107 million in federal funding was cut from Victorian health funding last year, hospitals had to readjust their budgets, and when they did so they needed to plan for a whole range of activities. It is all very well to say that the funding has now been restored, but planning needs to be done and there is a human resources component to it. For example, planning needs to be done on the number of clinicians who can undertake the procedures that are required. Whether they are for day patients or

longer-stay patients or for major or minor surgery, these procedures have to be planned. Often practitioners will need to take holidays or may have private practices to attend to, so they are not always in the public system. Some also have responsibilities outside the public system. These are some of the issues hospital services have to administer and manage, and that is why I think the federal minister does not understand; she just does not get it.

Mr O'Brien — She does not understand the impact of the carbon tax.

Ms CROZIER — No. She does not understand the impact of the carbon tax, because the carbon tax goes to costs, including ongoing costs to the bottom line of a hospital's management. Whether it is surgery, doing the laundry, cleaning or running electricity to keep a department open, all services in a hospital use power. Hospitals are enormous consumers of power, and a carbon tax goes straight to the bottom line and increases costs. In my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region the Alfred hospital will have hundreds of thousands of dollars of carbon tax impost to find, which will directly impact upon services that —

Mr Leane interjected.

Ms CROZIER — It will affect Mr Leane's area in Box Hill.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! The member, without assistance.

Ms CROZIER — To get back to my point, the carbon tax will directly affect services because it is money taken away from providing services, including the hiring of nurses, either full-time or casual nurses.

All hospitals have peak times, which can be very busy, certainly in the winter months; that is well known. There are peaks and troughs that trend throughout a hospital's year. When I was a manager in one of Melbourne's larger hospitals we used to cater for that. We used to look at what the staffing needs were for those busy times, and we would reduce staffing at less busy times. It was a perfectly practical and common-sense approach to take, but when you have imposts like a carbon tax or you have had money cut out of your budget midway you cannot plan for those things. I imagine that that would be of enormous frustration to those administrators; in fact I know it has been because I still know many people who work in the area and they have told me so. They have said that the demands are greater and that it is very difficult.

I have to say that I think the demands of the health services are probably far greater now than when I first worked in them in the early 1980s. I know that is some time ago; in fact it is almost 30 years to the day that I first started at the Alfred hospital. I was there just before Ash Wednesday, so I remember that very clearly, and I remember the demands.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I ask members on both sides to desist from interjections. I am sure that Mr O'Brien's intention is good, but it does not help the member to have interjections from her own side.

Ms CROZIER — In earlier debates we had been recalling the effects of Black Saturday, the 2009 bushfires. When Ash Wednesday occurred I was at the coalface at the Alfred hospital, and I remember clearly those very difficult times for everyone concerned, no more so than those directly affected — the patients who were flown in or brought by ambulance from country Victoria. As we all know, it was a tragic day, as were the more recent bushfire events. That highlighted to me the importance of our health services. I am very proud to have been working in the industry for as long as I did. It was extraordinary, and it is probably not too different from what we are all trying to achieve here.

That takes me back to my point, that we need to be administering taxpayer funds on behalf of all Victorians and that we have to monitor budgets so that health services, which work on behalf of all Victorians, can also achieve what they need to do. What the federal government has done is an extraordinary act. Hospitals, as we know, are under enormous pressure, as I have highlighted. They are working very hard and are unable to cope with such a large reduction in the national partnership agreement funding. As I have said, that is certainly having an impact on elective surgery waiting lists and activity, but despite those pressures hospitals are doing an extraordinary job. All the clinicians working in our health services should be commended and acknowledged for the work they do, and I am very much cognisant of that.

I come back to the point about the aspect Mr Jennings mentioned. He raised a number of things. He raised a point about the 'mischievous' campaign run by Mr David Davis, the Minister for Health, in relation to the impact of the federal health cuts. Mr Davis has a responsibility to speak to those health services as Minister for Health in this state and to directly understand their concerns. Those concerns were relayed to him very clearly because those health services

understand the impact of the health cuts. To say that it is a 'mischievous' campaign run by the government is extraordinary when we saw the blatant spending of taxpayers money by the federal government with those ads. I have to find a copy of one of those ads because I want to state what it says. It is headed 'Injecting \$107 million into Victorian hospitals' and says:

This will reverse cuts made by the Victorian government.

That is simply not true. The Victorian government did not cut \$107 million from Victorian hospital funding; it was the federal government. The second point says:

... patients will benefit directly from the commonwealth's investment which will see funding grow from \$3.6 billion in 2012–13 to \$4.5 billion in 2015–16. That's an increase of \$900 million.

That advertisement, run by the federal Labor government, was an absolute abuse of taxpayers money, and all Victorians should be appalled at Labor for wasting that money on trying to justify its cuts. To say that we are running a 'mischievous' campaign is extraordinary.

Mr Leane — You are. Of course you are.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Leane and Labor members at a federal level have run an outrageous campaign.

Mr Leane — You cut \$616 million!

Ms CROZIER — The \$616 million has gone from wasted projects, which Labor is very good at doing. Do I have to go through them again? We found black holes. There were wasted projects. We are putting efficiencies back into the health services.

Mr Leane interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! There are constant interjections. This is not a conversation. Ms Crozier has the call. I am tolerant of quick interjections but not a constant set of sentences that would not really form an interjection.

Ms CROZIER — As I was saying, Mr Jennings made reference to that campaign, and I was just highlighting the campaign that was run at a federal level. Mr Jennings also talked about the statement of priorities with Southern Health. I think he said there was a deteriorating situation with targets and the amount of funding going to that particular health service. The Minister for Health has made it very clear that this year's statement of priorities for individual hospitals did not include \$9 million in additional contestable surgery funding this year. Under this

initiative more than 2000 additional elective surgeries will take place.

What hospitals need is secure and predictable funding. They do not need decisions made on a whim because black holes need to be plugged. They do not need the opposition's federal counterparts making ridiculous assertions such as those that have been made by the federal Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek.

I return to some of the points that have been raised by the Victorian Minister for Health in recent days. I refer to a media release from him last Friday, 1 March, which speaks of the federal funding cuts that have hit elective surgery waiting lists at the Alfred hospital. Mr Davis said:

... the performance report shows strong performances by the Alfred hospital in a number of key areas.

The figures show that despite the pressures, Victoria's most urgent elective and emergency patients continue to receive immediate attention.

The Alfred hospital is obviously taking a lot of those emergency patients, as it normally does. It has a helipad — and the minister should also be commended for securing an ambulance helicopter service in regional Victoria. That has made an enormous difference to people —

Mr O'Brien interjected.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Koch has been lobbying for that for a long time, as has Mr O'Brien, in relation to their constituents in Western Victoria Region. I come from far western Victoria, and I know how long it takes to get to Melbourne. This is an enormous service for people who may find themselves in the unfortunate predicament of being in a serious accident.

To get back to the performance report in relation to emergency patients, I highlight to the chamber that in this media release Mr Davis also said that:

... even though more people are now waiting for elective surgery, the latest performance report shows that the most urgent category 1 patients all still received their treatment within 30 days, and hospitals were able to maintain an 11-day turnaround as the median time to treatment.

Victoria remains the only state to meet the target for 100 per cent of category 1 elective surgery patients, those who are most urgently in need of surgery.

At the Alfred 14 732 patients presented to the emergency department in the three months to the end of December, up from 14 432 presentations for the same quarter in 2011. The Alfred provided an average of 955 hours of care per day in the intensive care unit, up

from an average of 854 hours in the same quarter in 2011. That is an enormous amount of work in that very busy and complex unit. The situation is the same for the emergency department. That is an enormous workload, and those who are involved should be congratulated on the role they undertake.

The Alfred was on bypass for 1.6 per cent of the time in the three months to the end of December, well below the state benchmark of 3 per cent and an improvement on the 1.7 per cent bypass rate in the previous three months. In the three months to the end of December the Alfred treated 100 per cent of category 1 patients immediately on their arrival at the emergency department and it treated 76 per cent of semi-urgent category 4 patients within an hour of their arrival at the emergency department. There are other very good statistics that the Alfred should be very pleased with. It saw 5143 patients arrive by ambulance at its busy emergency department, up from 5082 attendances in the previous quarter.

It can be seen that an enormous amount of activity occurs at that health service, which caters for many Victorians in metropolitan Melbourne as well as many patients from regional Victoria and interstate. I know the Alfred has specialist services which cater for the health needs of patients from Tasmania and South Australia. These are very encouraging figures, and that is one area we need to be continually improving because many patients are going to require the services of hospitals like the Alfred and the Monash Medical Centre.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

Ms CROZIER — As Mr Pakula lives on that side of town, he might need to access the Monash Medical Centre. If he were to be elected as the member for Lyndhurst in the Assembly, it would possibly be even closer for him. He will get to understand that very effective health service, should the need arise. I sincerely hope it does not happen, but his children might need the services of the Monash Children's hospital.

Mr Tarlamis interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I know that members on both sides of this chamber will be very glad to see the continuation of the services provided by the Monash Medical Centre — and the children's hospital, which will be built as has been announced — which assist people in the southern areas of Melbourne. However, I point out that the commonwealth health-care funding cuts would have had an impact of \$13.7 million on that

health service alone. That is an extraordinary amount of money to be cut, and it would have directly affected services. That amount of money would pay for a lot of operations and a lot of beds — some might even have not been fully occupied; it is a lot of nurses, doctors and other administrative hours that could have been paid for without that impost. That goes to the heart of what we are talking about today.

Mr Jennings's motion refers to elective surgery waiting lists. The government has done an extraordinary amount to argue on behalf of Victorian patients for the restoration of that funding. I am pleased that the federal government has restored that funding, but I would encourage those opposite to also argue for the return of \$368 million to Victorian health services over the next three years. The \$107 million has only been restored until 30 June this year. From 1 July further cuts will have an impact, and this will go to the heart of what I have been speaking on for the last 43 minutes — those elective surgery lists. All those patients who come in for services in our public hospital system will be impacted.

Minister Davis should be commended for the work he has undertaken in this area. He has argued very effectively on behalf of Victorian patients; he has led the charge in that respect. Other states have looked to the minister's leadership on this issue and seen the money restored to Victoria, and as a result of this I am sure they also want the money cut from their budgets restored.

Mr O'Brien — So far they have some of the money; the feds have to give the rest back.

Ms CROZIER — They do need to give the rest back — \$368 million needs to be restored. That is an enormous amount over the next three years. As I said, this \$107 million only takes us to 30 June. On 1 July \$368 million in cuts will kick in. The administrators within those health services know the direct impact these cuts will have.

In conclusion, I believe Minister Davis has argued very effectively to have the \$107 million of funding restored, but the government is still arguing for a further \$368 million to be restored. We urge those opposite to go to their federal counterparts and argue for Victorian patients. We will not be supporting Mr Jennings's motion. It is a nonsense, as I have highlighted. I reiterate that he should go to his federal counterpart and argue for Victoria's fair share.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My contribution will be quite brief. It has been interesting

listening to both sides of this argument. It is clearly one of the reasons why the Greens, via Senator Richard Di Natale, put an inquiry into the federal Senate's Finance and Public Administration References Committee linked to the very issue around funding. I think health is too important for one side of the room to say, 'You took it off us', only for the other side of the room to say, 'You took it off us'. Clearly the federal government should not have taken away the \$107 million; clearly the state government should not have withdrawn \$600 million from health — —

Mr O'Brien — Redirected it.

Ms HARTLAND — Redirected it? I would really like a list of where it has been redirected to. Some of the things I would like to have seen it redirected to include the dental clinic in Footscray — we still do not know about that — and possibly a rebuild of the emergency room at Footscray hospital, which has a fabulous staff but a really run-down room.

Mr O'Brien — What did Labor do about it?

Ms HARTLAND — I am speaking about what is happening in this government; you are currently the government.

Mr O'Brien — What did Labor do?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I ask Mr O'Brien to cease interjecting.

Mr O'Brien — I am just seeing if she can criticise Labor.

Ms HARTLAND — If Mr O'Brien had been listening just 30 seconds ago he would have heard me say that I thought it was completely wrong of the federal government to withdraw the money. He obviously only wants to listen to — whatever; I am never sure what that is.

I would like to see health funding being used properly. I would like to see health funding being used where it is actually needed. Interestingly, tomorrow the Senate's Finance and Public Administration References Committee will release its report. I am aware that the Minister for Health made a submission to that inquiry, so it will be fascinating to see how all of that comes together.

We will be supporting this motion because I am concerned about the fact that since 2010 the waiting list has gone up by 10 000; no matter what excuses anybody makes, no matter what is said, it has still gone up by 10 000 people. That needs to be addressed. If

there is no honesty about this, how can we address these issues? I would like to see from the state government a list of all the things that have been affected by the cuts it has brought in, as well as all the things that have been affected by the federal cuts. I would also like to see the 100 beds that the government promised during the 2010 election; I have not seen a list of those yet. They are a few things that I would like to see from the government, though I will not hold my breath.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to rise today to make a contribution in support of the motion of Mr Jennings, and I thank him for bringing this important debate to the house. This motion is about a crisis in our health system. We know that the government is in crisis. During the course of this debate the other place is having question time, in which questions are being asked as to whether the government still exists and whether, with the loss of the member for Frankston, Mr Geoff Shaw, as a member of the parliamentary Liberal Party, the government still retains the confidence of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr Leane interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — As Mr Leane says, there are big question marks around this issue. The Premier is certainly seeking to dodge the fundamental question as to whether the government still retains the confidence of the other place.

Mr O'Brien — On a point of order, Deputy President, Ms Mikakos is clearly not speaking to the motion. I ask you to draw her back to the motion.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! There is some validity to the point of order, but I am sure Ms Mikakos is making passing reference to these matters in the context of what has been a fairly wide-ranging debate.

Ms MIKAKOS — The point I was making is that the government is in crisis, and the health crisis that we are experiencing at the moment is just one illustration of that. There are many other examples, including confirmation today that the state of Victoria is now in recession — 30 000 Victorians lost their jobs during January. The only jobs that this government is focused on are the Premier's own job and that of Mr Weston. This government needs to focus on the key issues facing this state. We have seen an absolute circus in this place today. We have seen a crisis of confidence amongst government members; we have members opposite doing the numbers for Mr Guy; we have members of the coalition backbench — —

Hon. P. R. Hall — On a point of order, Deputy President, I think Ms Mikakos has extended her contribution to making more than a passing reference to matters extraneous to the content of the motion.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I was about to intervene on this matter. I have asked Ms Mikakos to speak on the motion. There is some latitude, as Ms Mikakos knows, to make passing reference to matters that are surrounding the motion before the Chair, but she is required to stick generally to the motion, and I ask her to come back to it.

Ms MIKAKOS — I am always happy to be guided by your advice, Deputy President. The context that I am seeking to illustrate for the Victorian people is that the health crisis is symptomatic of the lack of leadership that this government is demonstrating at the moment. The government has been in office for two years, and all it does day after day, is come to question time, and either seek to blame the previous government, as Ms Crozier did in her contribution, or blame Canberra, as other members of the government sought to do in their contributions. It does not accept responsibility for its own failings.

Ms Crozier interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I intervened a number of times to stop people interjecting during Ms Crozier's contribution, and I ask her to return that favour.

Ms MIKAKOS — The government is just not willing to accept responsibility for the health crisis it is responsible for. We know it has cut over \$616 million from the Department of Health's budget. We know about the absolutely disrespectful way the government sought to treat nurses, key health professionals, in our state in the industrial dispute last year. We have observed the complete disrespect this government has shown to the Victorian public in terms of seeking to hide data that relates to the performance of our hospitals. At least the Victorian people now know the truth. Earlier in the week Mr Ramsay had a bit to say about the truth, and I agree with him. The government does need to demonstrate and show some truth. It is about time that government members came in here and accepted responsibility for health cuts and the impact it is having on patients across the state.

As highlighted in the motion from Mr Jennings, when the Baillieu-led coalition came to office the waiting list for elective surgery was 38 897. The data shows that after five quarters in a row of waiting lists blowing out the waiting list is now at a record high of 47 760. That

is an increase of almost 10 000 Victorian patients who are now on the waiting list for elective surgery. Those waiting lists have been blowing out under this government's watch. It happened way before anything Canberra did, but this government is seeking to hide the reality of the situation, which is that those waiting lists have been blowing out for some time because of cuts made on its watch in its first and second budgets.

My constituents in Northern Metropolitan Region are suffering as a result of these cuts. I have received ongoing complaints that indicate that the waiting times for outpatients, as well as for elective surgery, have been steadily increasing over the last two years. On previous occasions I have come into the house and highlighted some of these cases. Last year I highlighted the plight of one of my constituents who received a letter from the Northern Hospital dated 13 August 2012 — note the date, Mr Elsbury — which said the following:

We are currently experiencing an extremely large demand on this service —

this is the ear, nose and throat service —

which can result in long delays of over a year ...

It may be worthwhile visiting your family doctor ... to discuss this issue, as they might be able to refer you to another service with shorter waiting times.

In effect the Northern Hospital is encouraging my constituents — its patients — to explore other options because due to its funding situation it cannot cope with demands on that service. That hospital is extremely busy because it is in a growth area and it needs to receive further support from this government, which it is clearly not getting.

Another constituent of mine received a letter regarding the cancellation of an eye appointment. That letter states:

Northern Health is currently experiencing significant staffing issues within the eye service. Unfortunately this means that we must cancel your previously scheduled appointment ...

...

Unfortunately at this time Northern Health is unable to provide a time frame for when the service will be fully staffed. We therefore suggest that you return to your GP to discuss options for care.

At the moment a lot of my constituents are getting these kinds of letters from Northern Hospital where they are being encouraged to explore other options, which is a euphemism for 'go private'. That is what 'other options' means, because if your other option is to go to

another public hospital which is experiencing similar delays and waiting list times because of state government cuts, then the only option is to go private. Mr Davis may not realise this, but in my part of town there are a lot of people who are economically disadvantaged. A lot of those families cannot afford to go private. They do not have private health insurance. They rely on a quality public health system to look after their families.

As I said, many of my constituents are suffering a great deal of pain as they wait for elective surgery. When they receive this kind of correspondence and are given some kind of time frame indication — and in fact a lot of them are not because my office has had to intervene and ring the hospital to try to give those patients some time frame indication — they are told that they are looking at waiting a year, if not longer, for an important operation. These people are in pain. In many cases these are people whose employment and family carer responsibilities are affected because of their medical condition. These people are not just statistics. They are the ones we are talking about when we say almost 48 000 people are on the elective surgery waiting list for important medical care.

After months of delays last week the Baillieu government released the much delayed Victorian health services performance data for two quarters, which shows a system that is struggling to cope. We have seen media headlines such as '10 000 more waiting for surgery under Baillieu', 'Secret documents show surgery blow-out for Victorian hospitals', 'State fails health targets as patients face long delays in ER' and 'Patients waiting too long'. All of these stories and the data itself show that there is no good news under this government for Victorian patients.

There is a litany of mismanagement of Victoria's health system by the Baillieu government which started well before the Minister for Health, Mr Davis, started a fight with the federal government and tried to shift the blame for what he has been doing. He has tried to shift responsibility away from himself for his own action of ripping more than \$600 million out of the health budget.

A huge growth in the waiting lists occurred before 12 September last year, with only 297 patients added in the September–December quarter. I am not saying that it is acceptable, but the waiting lists were blowing out well before the fourth quarter of last year. Elective surgery waiting lists have increased and ambulances response times have lengthened. There have been many other cuts to services, including to translation services

at the Northern Hospital, which I have spoken about previously.

I want to run through some of the statistics that relate to the hospitals that service my electorate, because they have fared dismally over the last two years under this government. The Austin Hospital fell short of meeting elective surgery targets for category 2 patients by 29 per cent and for category 3 patients by 21 per cent. The Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital fell short of meeting elective surgery targets for category 2 patients by 8 per cent. Northern Hospital fell short of meeting elective surgery targets for category 2 patients by 16 per cent and for category 3 patients by 1 per cent. The Royal Children's Hospital fell short of meeting elective surgery targets for category 2 patients by 8 per cent and for category 3 patients by 15 per cent. The Royal Melbourne Hospital fell short of meeting elective surgery targets for category 2 patients by 27 per cent and for category 3 patients by 19 per cent. St Vincent's Hospital fell short of meeting elective surgery targets for category 2 patients by 5 per cent. The Broadmeadows Health Service fell short of meeting elective surgery targets for category 3 patients by 15 per cent. More and more people will be forced to wait longer for surgery whilst the Premier and the Minister for Health fail to acknowledge that Victoria's health system is chronically underfunded because of their own cuts.

If that is not enough evidence, 56 of the 81 health services that tabled annual reports last year ran up a deficit. Many health services reports detail the need for urgent future planning to cater for increasing demand for health services. As I indicated, Northern Hospital is situated in one of the state's busiest corridors. According to its latest annual report, Northern Health's catchment covers around 728 000 people and this population is expected to grow by 64 per cent — an additional 128 569 people — in the next 20 years. Northern Hospital fell short of meeting emergency department targets for category 2 patients by 3 per cent and for category 3 patients by 22 per cent. As I indicated, the statistics get even worse in the most recently released quarterly data on elective surgery at that hospital.

Austin Hospital fell short of meeting targets for emergency department category 3 patients by 5 per cent. The Royal Melbourne Hospital fell short of the same target by 7 per cent and St Vincent's Hospital fell short by 5 per cent. The Royal Children's Hospital fell short of the target for emergency department category 2 patients by 1 per cent. These are children who are required to be seen within 10 minutes and yet are waiting much longer.

Turning to the ambulance crisis, the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2013* shows that ambulance response times have blown out at an alarming rate under the Baillieu government. When Labor was in government, Melburnians could expect an ambulance to arrive in about 15 minutes; under Premier Baillieu waiting times have increased to almost 19 minutes. The latest hospital figures also show that ambulance transfer times fell well short of the 90 per cent target. Austin Hospital fell short by a staggering 31.4 per cent, Northern Hospital fell short by 32.3 per cent, the Royal Melbourne Hospital fell short by 21.8 per cent and St Vincent's Hospital fell short by 23.3 per cent.

There have been many blow-outs to waiting lists in my local hospitals, whether it be elective surgery waiting lists, the duration of time that patients are waiting in the emergency department or the time it takes for ambulances to attend to them and take them to hospital. Last year cuts were made to interpreting services at Northern Health as part of that hospital's attempts to find savings because of the cuts made by the government. The cuts will amount to a staggering 7000 appointments over the current year, which equates to 16 per cent of its total requests in 2011. These requests are mostly from the elderly migrants and refugees who make up a large proportion of my electorate and rely heavily on interpreters for effective communication with their doctors. I am concerned about what it will mean for patient care when doctors' instructions cannot be effectively communicated to those patients.

In conclusion, the health system is buckling under the pressure of this government's \$616 million cuts to the health system. The cuts are hurting Victorian patients. The finger-pointing that the Minister for Health continues to engage in is just prolonging the suffering; it is not convincing everybody. I welcome the fact that the federal government in Canberra has restored the funding to Victoria's health system, but I think it is now important that Mr Davis does likewise by putting the money back into Victoria's health system. The government needs to take responsibility for what it is doing. Unfortunately the government is in crisis; there is no leadership. But it is time that this government stepped up and got on with the job it was elected to do — that is, governing for all Victorians and making sure that there is a quality public health system in place to look after all Victorian patients.

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — It is with some irony that I rise to speak on a health motion given the gravelly nature of my voice, but I feel it is a very important motion to speak on, especially for the

western suburbs of Melbourne where we have massive growth occurring that the federal government tells us is not happening. When the City of Wyndham states that it has over 12 000 people a year moving into its municipality, it beggars belief that the federal government can say that our population has dropped by 11 000 people. It does not make sense, and that can be seen clearly by the number of households that are calling not only the city of Wyndham but also the cities of Melton and Hume home.

The Victorian government has increased health funding by \$1.3 billion since coming to office, with the health budget reaching a record \$13.37 billion. The former government left us with a legacy of \$30 million worth of elective surgery which had not paid been for. It could not be delivered because there was a \$30 million gap. We also had to deal with a \$6.1 billion GST hit from the federal government when it changed the way the GST was allocated to the states, and we had to backfill our elective surgery capacity using other means.

I took note of Ms Mikakos's speech and the letter sent to a patient in August 2012 telling them that their elective surgery could not occur. She said that was before the health cuts, but she neglected to point out that there was a \$50 million lapse in commonwealth national partnership agreement funds at the beginning of the financial year. The federal government finished giving us money for that elective surgery on 30 June 2012, and apparently that had no bearing on elective surgery in the state of Victoria. Then we had the \$107 million gutting of health services funding in the December quarter —

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr ELSBURY — I will get to that; Mr Leane should not worry about that. We also heard a bit of a jibe against private health insurance. I am pleased to say that I have private health insurance because I have the capacity to pay for it —

Ms Mikakos — A lot of my constituents just cannot afford it.

Mr ELSBURY — Just wait, Ms Mikakos; just calm down.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! That is actually my job; it is not Mr Elsbury's job. He should proceed with his contribution to the motion.

Mr ELSBURY — I am terribly sorry, Deputy President. I have the capacity to pay for private health insurance. Capacity in the public sector — the public's health service — is assisted by the people who can pay

for private health insurance and who can get their surgery done in an alternate system, so beds can be made available for those who cannot afford it. As Ms Mikakos pointed out by way of interjection, a lot of people in her electorate and certainly in mine have difficulty paying for private health insurance. But it is a wonderful system where I can pay my private health insurance and get out of the way so that a public patient can take the bed that otherwise I might well be taking this evening depending on how this cold goes.

We also had to deal with a few little trinkets that were left behind by the Labor government. Forgetting to put an ICT system into the Royal Children's Hospital was a slight oversight of some \$25 million which had to be rectified by this government. Labor in government seemed to forget that computers are needed in modern health services. Then there was the \$55.2 million in Christmas salaries which were unfunded when we first came to office. I do not know how the previous government missed that one; people still get paid over the Christmas break. I suspect that nurses and doctors still need to be available to look after people who have either recently had surgery or who potentially could have to have emergency surgery, but that was overlooked, and we were left with a \$55.2 million hole almost before we started our term in office.

I have taken note of the date in August 2012, and I point out to Ms Mikakos that the actions of the previous government and the actions of the federal government caused disruptions to elective surgery waiting lists. The Victorian government warned at the time the national partnership agreement funding was cut that there would be a shortfall of 7200 elective surgeries in Victoria alone, and that figure is now being borne out.

I refer back to the \$107 million in commonwealth funding that was cut from the bottom line of hospitals in the December quarter. If you read the full-page advertisements in the major dailies in Melbourne you would be thinking, 'Hallelujah, the \$107 million is back. How awesome is that?'. But it is not awesome at all, because hospitals had to make decisions about how they were going to deliver their health services without the \$107 million. I know from talking to people who are in the health sector — members of various health boards and even managers of health services — that they had arranged for people to take annual leave or long service leave, they had told people they were going to be stood down and they had rung up patients and said, 'Do you know what? Don't come in, we don't have the money for your surgery'. It is a bit like trying to turn around the RMS *Queen Elizabeth 2* when she has a full head of steam — it is going to take a while before we catch up on the lag that has been left by a

federal government which is so desperate to fund its budget surplus that it has to rip money out of health funding. It is not just Victoria that has copped this; every single state and territory in the commonwealth has been walloped with a reduction in their budgets.

We have received the \$107 million, and that is good; it will help patients. But what happens to the \$368 million over the next three years from 1 July that we are missing out on? Where has that money gone? It is a major problem.

I can tell members that in the western suburbs of Melbourne the impact of the federal government cuts has been felt. I refer to an article published in the *Wyndham Leader* on 29 January headed 'Budget cuts shock hospital' which states:

Werribee Mercy Hospital is the only public hospital in Victoria's fastest growing municipality. Hence, we feel the need to comment on the public health funding cuts.

This is from Professor Stephen Cornelissen, who is the Mercy's chief executive. He goes on to say:

Plainly, Victoria's public hospitals have been asked to make \$107 million in savings this financial year due to reduced commonwealth funding to the state.

I repeat: reduced commonwealth funding to the state. For Mercy Health that translates to an immediate \$3 million cut between now and 30 June 2013. An unplanned and unbudgeted cut like this will hurt. It certainly has hurt and it will continue to hurt as we try to pick up the slack left by a federal government which took money away from elective surgeries in Victoria and now seems to want to be praised for giving back what was ours in the first place.

In the *Wyndham Weekly* of 16 January 2013 an article headed 'Werribee Mercy pain — longer wait, fewer surgeries, no new staff, fears on nurses' states:

Patients could face longer waits for elective surgeries and beds at Werribee Mercy Hospital as management looks for ways to deal with funding cuts.

Mercy Public Hospitals, which runs Werribee Mercy and the Mercy Hospital for Women, has announced plans to reduce elective surgeries and beds at Werribee after its budget was cut by \$3 million.

The budget cut is the result of a federal government — again, I underline 'federal government' —

decision to reduce Victoria's health funding by \$107 million after the census data showed a drop in the state's population.

I would love to know which census data that was. The article continues:

In a memo to staff last Friday, Mercy Public Hospitals executive director Linda Mellors said the funding cuts would result in a reduction of services.

She said Werribee would have a reduction in patient beds and cots, elective surgeries and outpatient and support services.

In this municipality between 75 and 80 babies are born every week. There must be something in the water, but every week there are between 75 and 80 newborns in the municipality, so you would wonder why it has received a budget cut of such a savage nature from the federal government.

I also have a media release from Western Health, the other major health provider in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The media release dated 21 December 2012 and headed 'Impact of federal funding cuts on services at Western Health' states:

The flow-on from federal funding cuts will see a range of measures taken by Western Health as it tries to accommodate a mid-financial year budget cut of \$6.46 million.

It goes on to say:

... Overall up to 70 beds will be closed ... Associate Professor Cockram said.

Associate Professor Cockram goes on to say:

Elective surgery will be affected with a number of operating theatre closures which could impact up to 1300 patients requiring elective surgery. Their operations will need to be re-scheduled and this will cause unavoidable increases in waiting times.

Therefore it is a bit rich for Mr Jennings to come in here and start saying that we have these problems due to the reorganisation of health services in Victoria.

I have many more articles that I could refer to, but this is an interesting one from the *Herald Sun*. The headline is 'Crisis in Western Health', and I will leave the date as a bit of surprise at the end. The article states:

Wards are being closed, surgeries cancelled and hospitals left in disrepair as the health network serving some of Melbourne's poorest battlers reaches breaking point.

Western Health network is slashing its services, including to children, because of costs.

It goes on to say:

It is understood there will be budget cuts estimated at \$15 million. The consequences are believed to be:

more than 2000 elective operations to be axed in the 2007–08 financial year;

one ward being closed at Western Hospital, with patient numbers down by about 100;

up to 40 people waiting on trolleys each day in emergency departments at Western and Sunshine;

and two of the three paediatric surgeons at Sunshine Hospital are taking leave because their working hours are being slashed.

That article is dated 3 June 2007, which was while Labor was in government. That is how it treated the western suburbs of Melbourne. That is what it did to us.

Ms Hartland — A lot like what you do.

Mr ELSBURY — A lot like what we do, says Ms Hartland. Need I point out to Ms Hartland that we treat the western suburbs a hell of a lot better than members opposite when it comes to delivering an intensive care unit at Sunshine Hospital. This intensive care unit was promised in 1999 by the Kennett government. It was mothballed by the Bracks government and used as a recording studio for *Stingers*. Who needs patients when you can get film equipment in there? That is the difference between a government that knows what needs to be done, which is to deliver an intensive care unit with capacity for maternity patients, which is absolutely vital for the western suburbs of Melbourne, and one that does not. I doubt whether any health contribution can be made by a film studio in a hospital. That is a disgrace.

The coalition government has certainly been working to improve the infrastructure of hospitals in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The elective surgery waiting lists have increased. There is no doubt about that, and a lot more work needs to be done here, but as I have pointed out we had \$50 million of federal government funding cut from elective surgery capacity at the beginning of the financial year. We have had a further \$107 million disappear and reappear — sort of. We should be saying to federal Minister for Health Tanya Plibersek, ‘Show me the money’ — to quote one of those Tom Cruise films that I cannot stand — ‘Show me the money, Tanya. Show me the money’. I wish I could do the voice right now.

Victoria is the only state to reach its target of 100 per cent of category 1 patients. Anyone who is in urgent need of surgery receives it. We have work to do in categories 2 and 3, but category 1 patients are receiving the attention they require. In the December quarter of 2012 there was a 7.1 per cent increase in emergency admissions to hospitals, which has also put a strain on a number of our health-care facilities.

The opposition talks about hospitals being on ambulance bypass and about ambulance waiting times, but which government has had the guts to provide that information in real time? That would be this

government. The Baillieu government has provided that information in real time so that people can see exactly what is happening at any moment of the day. Hospitals spent 1.9 per cent of the time on ambulance bypass in the December quarter, which is well below the 2.9 per cent rate in the September quarter and well below the benchmark target of 3 per cent. We are reaching our benchmarks and there has been an improvement.

Our dear friends in the federal government were given an option with this \$107 million in how they put it back into our hospitals, and that could have been done very efficiently. They could have given the money to the Victorian Department of Health, which could have put that money into bank accounts of the various health providers over the weekend so that they could access it and get on with what they do best. Instead the federal government decided to play politics, puff up its chest and get all antsy, saying, ‘No, no. We’ll do it. We’ll give it straight to the hospitals’. Now we have the hospital administrators standing around scratching their heads and saying, ‘How is that going to work? How are you going to do that? There are no mechanisms in place to make that sort of thing happen, but fair enough. We’ll wait for the cheque in the mail, I suppose, or you can give us your credit card number and we’ll put it through the old EFTPOS machine’.

I can see it now down at Western Health — they will have to wander down to the cafeteria, ask if they can borrow the EFTPOS machine and have the \$6.2 million dropped straight into their bank account. I cannot see it happening, but in any case that is the sort of thing that the federal government expects us to believe.

Certainly the premise upon which the \$107 million was withdrawn from the state government and our state health system and the justification for the cash grab was a reduction of 11 million people in the state of Victoria — —

Mr Lenders — Eleven million?

Mr ELSBURY — Sorry about that — 11 000 people. Mr Lenders should have picked that up; he was the former Treasurer. Good on him. Well done. Too bad he could not have done that with the poker machines. I could go there, but I will not.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Mr ELSBURY — I am being egged on here. We have a former Treasurer who seems to think that, judging from previous statements he has made in this house, poker machine venues paying more for their licences would have meant a price increase for people who use the poker machines. Last time I checked a

\$1 bet was a \$1 bet and a 5 cent bet was a 5 cent bet. All we are doing is cutting into the take of the poker machine venues. Members can only imagine what this government could have done with the money that would have been generated if it had realised the full value of the poker machine licences. Now Mr Lenders is wishing he had not mentioned it.

So apparently 11 000 people disappeared from Melbourne. That would have been one heck of a gangland war, or the missing persons unit would have been quite busy with that sort of thing, but of course we all know that Victoria is continuing to grow and its population is continuing to increase. As we continue to fast-track redevelopment in the established parts of Melbourne, services still need to be provided to our ever-increasing population. We intend to provide those services by being smarter in the way we use the money we have.

The opposition has talked about the \$616 million worth of state government savings. We have made those savings by reducing waste, driving efficiency, making improvements in our health system and reducing consultation costs, which the previous government seemed to be completely addicted to. 'What are we going to do — consult someone?'. 'Yes'. 'How much is it going to cost?'. 'Don't worry about that, just pay them'. That was the attitude of the former government — 'Don't worry about it. It's the taxpayers money. Who really cares?'. This government has reduced its spending on consultation so it can put a greater focus on service delivery. The state government savings that were announced in the 2011–12 and 2012–13 financial years are to be reinvested in delivering front-line services spread out over the next six years. So instead of wasting money on consultancies and inefficiencies within the system we are going to move this money out into front-line services.

For want of a better term, the Prime Minister has snatched the funding away completely, taken her bat and ball and gone home. She has really cracked it with us. She has walked off and left the stumps behind. She sent a very terse letter to the Premier in which she said:

Today I wrote to each of our first minister colleagues regarding the commonwealth's decision to address your disingenuous campaign about health-care funding in Victoria —

'disingenuous' meaning that \$107 million has been ripped out of Victoria's bottom line halfway through the financial year when budgets have been set and surgeries have been booked. The Prime Minister went on to say:

I made clear to first ministers that the federal government will not tolerate state or territory governments engaging in this kind of game playing.

Apparently this 'game playing' is when a state or territory government disagrees with the federal government taking money away from it. We are standing up for Victorians, which is exactly what those opposite did not do when they refused to vote for motions that were put forward in this place to condemn the federal government for withdrawing the funds from us in the first place.

As part of the homework I have done in preparing for my speech, I discovered an article on the internet — that good old World Wide Web that apparently was invented by Al Gore, if you asked him about it a few years ago. The article dated 24 January is titled 'Australian hospital funding cuts cause bed closures'. It states:

Health care job cuts and hospital bed closures are being unveiled in Australia, as state governments implement the funding cuts announced by the federal Labor government last year.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard last October said her government had 'revised' its previous assessment of state health funding requirements, based on new population and costing data. As a result, \$403 million of previously allocated funding would not be delivered to the states for the 2012–2013 financial year. In the case of Victoria, this meant a loss of \$107 million.

...

Federal health minister Tania Plibersek said the main reason for the recent 'revision' was the lowering of the price of health care, as determined by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The Gillard government has refused to publish the figures it used to calculate the reduced funding.

It is always interesting to note where information of this sort can be found, because that article came from the World Socialist Web Site. Even the red ragers understand these health cuts that have come from the federal government are based on flawed figures, and yet those opposite just do not get it. I think that is why they are sitting over there.

In addition to the \$107 million cut, which I have gone on about ad nauseam, the withdrawal of \$50 million from the state's elective surgery budget that was announced in the last federal budget has had an impact on the way in which health services are delivered in Victoria. It is a reality that when the state's resources are reduced, whether it is by cutting direct funding, redirecting money or reducing GST revenue, there will be an impact on the services the state is able to provide to its population.

I hope and pray the Prime Minister will take as much notice of the western suburbs of Melbourne as she has of the western suburbs of Sydney. I hope she will visit us in the west and support some of the other projects that she could have supported. The Sneydes Road overpass is one project she could have helped to pay for, but her government snubbed it. There are other items that are in desperate need of funding in the city of Wyndham, including a sports centre, which I would suggest is a form of preventive medicine, and various other services that could be provided to the people of the western suburbs. I hope Ms Gillard will hop on a plane, maybe spend some time in the house she claims she has in Altona and actually give us the same treatment she is giving to the people of western Sydney. But I do not want the same treatment; I want to see some actual results from the federal government. I would prefer to see a tangible change for the better in the city of Wyndham and the western suburbs of Melbourne.

With that I will say, in case you have not already worked it out, Acting President, that I will not be voting in favour of this motion.

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise and speak in support of the motion. It was interesting to hear Mr Elsbury bang on and on about the federal government. He is part of the state government, and yet he glosses over the cuts that have been made to our health system by this Liberal-Nationals coalition government since it came to power.

This is a bit like *deja vu*. Mr Elsbury talked about the western suburbs and western health. I remember when Labor was elected to government back in 1999, and I well remember the state of the Western Health network after many years of the Kennett government's cuts to our health system. I remember it well, and so do the people of Victoria. What do we see with the Baillieu-Ryan government? Again, we see cuts to the health system, a decline in services, an increase in waiting lists and a less than satisfactory health system. It is not about the actions of the federal government; it is in fact about this state government, which has not changed its colours. The Baillieu-Ryan coalition government is being entirely consistent and doing everything we said it would do before 2010 when it was elected. We could anticipate the way it would behave in relation to health, education and emergency services, because we had seen it in action before.

Mr Elsbury interjected.

Ms DARVENIZA — They did it before.

Mr Elsbury may not recall this, but I recall it well. The Western Health network was all but bankrupted by the then coalition government, the Kennett government. It had to sell off all its assets because its services in all its facilities across the western network had been cut to the bone. There were threats to close hospitals out in the west. I remember it well, but Mr Elsbury has chosen to forget all about that.

On this side of the house we know that when those in the Liberal-Nationals coalition are in government they are always consistent; they always return to form, and the form is to cut. That is what they resort to. It does not matter which services they are responsible for as the state government — health, education, the Country Fire Authority, ambulance services or any part of the public sector — because they are true to form every time. Every time you get a Liberal-Nationals coalition government in power it will cut the public sector, and its members have done so time and again. It is no different this time around with the Baillieu-Ryan government — no different at all. That is why I am pleased to speak in support of this motion.

After months of delay the Baillieu government has finally released its data detailing the health of the state hospital system and the number of people waiting for elective surgery, which has blown out to 47 760 — a record. Mr Elsbury and other government members can say what they like, but they win the prize for blowing out the waiting lists. They have broken a record and have won gold for blowing out waiting lists.

You cannot tell me that the fact the state government has ripped \$616 million from the health system has not had an impact on waiting lists, and there is also the fact that people are having to wait longer and longer. It does not matter whether it is one of our metropolitan hospitals, one of our large metropolitan teaching hospitals or a hospital such as those in my electorate in regional and rural Victoria, people are going to have to wait and suffer more pain, which is what is meant by waiting lists. The longer people have to wait, the more pain they are likely to experience. It does not matter whether it is a knee reconstruction or a hip replacement — it can be any sort of non-emergency surgery — patients will have to wait, and they will have to wait in pain. This is not delivering a good standard and high-quality health-care system to Victorians. Mr Elsbury should not kid himself; that is not what his government is delivering. His government is delivering a record blow-out in waiting lists. That is what he and his government have to be proud of.

I will mention some of the hospitals in my electorate. The health system has been in decline since this government was elected in 2010. As I said, the number of people waiting for elective surgery has skyrocketed and reached the highest ever levels — a record. In my electorate of Northern Victoria Region the trend in hospitals is that waiting lists are increasing. In Wangaratta, at Northeast Health, the waiting list in the 12 months to December 2012 increased by 97 patients, and in Bendigo 86 more patients were added to the list. More people are waiting while suffering constant and often very severe pain, and that impacts greatly on their quality of life.

It does not matter where you go or which of our hospitals you visit, in Victoria our emergency departments are full, and almost one in three patients are not being treated within the required time. That might be another record for Mr Elsbury; he might have won another gold there.

Ambulance response times are blowing out, meaning that people's lives are being put at risk. It is not just about being on a waiting list and knowing that you are going to be treated, but when the response time starts to blow out people who need urgent medical care will not get it in a timely way. If there is a medical emergency, then that can mean a patient dies, so it is very important to get right.

I briefly refer to the Auditor-General's report on ambulance paramedics, because this impacts on rural and regional areas, particularly because people in those areas are not getting the sort of service they deserve and require. According to the Auditor-General's report tabled in Parliament today, ambulance paramedics in regional and rural areas of the state had an average of 32 hours more unplanned leave in 2011–12 compared to their city-based colleagues. Unplanned leave among our overworked paramedics is crippling the capacity of rural and regional branches of the ambulance service to fill their shifts — that is, having enough paramedics on duty at any given time to be able to look after the people who need their services. Every time a shift goes unfilled, people who are living in regional Victoria are left dangerously exposed, particularly if they have life-threatening illnesses that could result in death or permanent disability. Entire communities are being left without ambulance cover, which could potentially lead to life-threatening situations.

The Auditor-General's report highlights concerns about the centralisation of rostering arrangements. Clearly this policy of centralising rostering in Melbourne has caused real problems in rural and regional areas. Many paramedics believe that if the rostering system is not

handed back to rural and regional areas, then they will not be able to fill the shifts and deliver a service to people in rural and regional areas who need those emergency services.

The Liberals and The Nationals in government have not delivered and are not delivering in health, and they refuse to even look at the consequences of the actions they have taken, particularly in relation to paramedics and the cuts to the health system. I certainly support this motion.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak against the motion moved by Mr Jennings condemning the government's performance in the area of health. Before Ms Darveniza leaves the chamber, let me say that as a former nurse she probably knows health better than many. It was interesting to hear her opening comments and her reflection on history up until 1999, which is a very convenient cut-off point. What she should have done was reflect back to 1992, when the former Kennett government was elected to office and the cupboards were bare and the state virtually bankrupt. The State Bank of Victoria had to be flogged off, and unemployment rates were well above double digits. There were huge debts and an inability to pay bills. The reforms made by the then Kennett government under very difficult circumstances are still in place today.

When Ms Darveniza runs the Labor line that this government is just about cutting, what she does not acknowledge is that this government — the Liberal Party in particular — has been about restructuring and introducing lasting reforms that leave our system in a better, more sustainable state. Two of those reforms, which remain in place today and which remained for the 11 years Labor was in government, are the establishment of the health networks to create greater flexibility of services — it is not just about bed counting — and the introduction of the controversial casemix funding. We had all of the left up in arms when that was introduced, but what that actually did was shift the mindset in health from looking just at beds to looking at cases, incidents and events and directing and linking funding to those via casemix funding. That is still there in the system. Those are two significant, lasting reforms of the health system that were implemented by the Liberal Party when last in government.

In relation to this notion that a Liberal government somehow only cuts, most of the time that is done because it is elected on the back of gross financial mismanagement and waste left by preceding Labor governments. The election slogan we used when we

were elected back in 2010, 'Fix the problems and build the future', yet again echoes and is reminiscent of what a Liberal government — or a coalition government, in this instance — is typically elected to do, which is to fix gross problems that are left by a Labor government that, as Mr Elsbury said, is usually about taxing and spending without really reforming. We are about embedding benefits as a positive legacy for our system and for Victorians in the community.

Specifically I would like to make some comments about what Labor has done and compare it with what we are doing now in the area of health. Just to digress for a moment, Labor left Victoria with a transport crisis, a housing crisis and a gaming crisis. Victorian businesses were closing, and the economy was going backwards. Victorians were losing jobs on a daily basis. That was all under the Brumby government. We came in with quite a legacy and many challenges with which to contend.

Under the Victorian coalition government and under the current leadership Victoria has championed improved hospital facilities and increased hospital funding to ensure that the federal Labor government stops ripping money out of Victorian hospitals. This government has already budgeted \$36 million for the inpatient expansions, especially at the Frankston Hospital, and there is \$15.8 million for the Monash Children's, which is also in South Eastern Metropolitan Region. The government has invested an extra \$883 million in public hospitals and \$364 million in capital works. Those are very significant investments in our health system. There is \$59.6 million for cancer research, including world-first trials of new treatments. The Victorian coalition government has delivered for Victorians in hospitals not just in my region but throughout the state.

Victoria can ill afford to go back to the dark days of a Labor government and believe the spin doctoring that Labor still clings on to. The opposition came into this chamber claiming that health was taken backwards under the Victorian coalition government just on that brief summation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Again, looking back at Labor's decade of neglect in Victoria's health system, Victorians remember a system that was rocked by ongoing exposés of systemic manipulation of hospital statistics and waiting lists. Labor members might have looked better, but who would have believed them? Given the systemic manipulation of hospital statistics, very few believed them.

In October 2007 we saw the leaking of a document that showed a secret Royal Melbourne Hospital waiting list

outlining the extraordinary extent of the crisis the former Labor government had created in the public hospital system. The leaked document was a catalogue of shocking neglect. It outlined how many Victorians, some from South Eastern Metropolitan Region, waited for years for crucial operations, including coronary bypasses, bowel resections, hip and knee replacements, removal of cancerous growths, removal of lumps in breasts, spinal operations and brain surgery. The track record of the Labor Party is certainly not of the high standard we wish to return to.

Along with subsequent media reports the April 2009 Victorian Auditor-General's report on access to public hospitals, which measured hospital performance, exposed the serious failings of Victoria's health system, including a systemic manipulation of data and the integrity of patient record keeping in our public hospitals. They were exposed by an audit embroiling three public hospitals which had manipulated performance data indicators and waiting lists. There were problems with waiting list categories and bypass cycles being created when the emergency department at the local hospital was full, with ambulances being directed to go elsewhere. That compromised care for critically ill patients. There was also the repeated cancellation of admissions for surgery from the waiting lists on ambiguous 'not ready for care' grounds.

The *Herald Sun* of 2 April 2009 revealed that more than 2300 people died over the preceding five years while on Victorian elective surgery waiting lists. Whistleblowers indicated that there were secret waiting lists of patients for elective surgery in our public hospitals. The reputations of public hospitals and health professionals were repeatedly undermined by a systemic cooking of the books in response to political pressure from a government not prepared to fix and fund public hospitals to standards of care required by patients. There had been an absence of regular open and transparent reporting on the performance of our hospitals, as was the case with quarterly *Your Hospitals* reports under previous governments and the Victorian coalition's quarterly *Victorian Health Services Performance Report*.

The submissions to the upper house health and hospitals inquiry also revealed some disturbing facts, including that recommendations in a ministerial review were ignored and not acted upon by the Brumby government; that there was evidence that phantom wards were commonplace in hospitals, yet the Brumby government denied all knowledge of them; that doctors were forced to sign contracts gagging them from speaking out about the crisis in our hospitals and were threatened with the sack; that there was increased

pressure on the system by an ageing and growing population; that there was limited funding and resources; that there was manipulation of data to improve hospital performance, or certainly perceptions of it; that there were two sets of elective surgery waiting lists kept but only one set published; and that there were reputable organisations speaking frankly and honestly about major issues of concern. The government has had to contend with inheriting a lot of significant concerns, and those challenges continue.

Despite those concerns since coming to office the Victorian coalition government has increased health funding by \$1.3 billion to a record \$13.7 billion. The state's budget funding for hospitals has increased since the coalition was elected; in fact the Victorian health service budget increased by an average of 5.1 per cent in 2012–13. The Victorian government has honoured its budget commitments, but regrettably the commonwealth government has not honoured its commitments, so those challenges are there because of a recalcitrant, difficult, federal Julia Gillard government.

In 2011 the former Victorian Labor government let \$30 million in elective surgery funding lapse. The \$6.1 billion GST hit on Victoria by the federal government has meant that alternative resources to backfill state and federal Labor's unfunded elective surgery waiting lists simply has not existed.

There were numerous black holes in the health budget when we came to government. They included, for example, the unfunded completion cost of \$44 million for the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre. There was also the failure to provide \$25 million to fit out the new Royal Children's Hospital with essential information and communications technology, which placed immediate and unavoidable pressure on health budget funds that would otherwise have been directed to elective surgery had the Labor government not been so incompetent. There was \$55.2 million in unfunded salaries and no source of funding for the 2010–11 Christmas–New Year period, and I mentioned earlier the pre-election manipulation of waiting lists for the former government's political benefit.

Elective surgery funding would have been much better had we not inherited these significant funding holes and challenges. The \$50 million in lapsing commonwealth national partnership agreement funding that was predominantly provided for elective surgery finished on 30 June 2012.

I had undertaken to speak only briefly and to say that the Liberal coalition government, which has always been associated with responsible management and reforming the system, is embedding the necessary reforms to leave a healthier system that is more transparent, more efficient and more effective. This task continues following our election to government in 2010, despite the challenges and the legacy left to us because of Labor's gross incompetency and despite the recalcitrant and difficult federal Labor government which I hope gets the fate it deserves. With those few words, I look forward to further improvements in our health system and in particular the provision of necessary services to South Eastern Metropolitan Region which I have the pleasure of representing. I inform the house that I have every intention of voting down this motion.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

WILDLIFE (GAME) REGULATIONS 2012

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) (*By leave*) — I advise the house that I have on the notice paper notices of motion 498 and 533, which were intended to be moved as a cognate debate. I wish to state that I will not be moving notice of motion 533.

I move:

That the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 be disallowed.

In moving the motion I state at the outset that the new regulations do not achieve their stated aims, which are the sustainable and equitable management of game resources, humane and safe hunting, and competency and accountability. I move the motion to disallow the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 because they do not achieve these aims and in fact are counterproductive to those aims.

The new wildlife regulations will increase exclusion zones in state game reserves for duck rescuers and other non-licensed shooters from 5 to 25 metres from the shoreline from sunset to 10.00 a.m. the following day for the entire duck shooting season. This is a major change to the regulations. Prior to this change a similar exclusion applied only for the opening weekend of the duck shooting season. The new regulations will extend these zones and times for the whole of the duck shooting season. The regulations also provide for a provisional game licence for children aged from 12 years without the requirement to sit a water fowl identification test and a 14-day tourist licence for

international visitors with the same non-requirement for a water fowl identification test. The regulations also provide for changes to deer hunting methods and designated deer hunting areas.

These changes are unnecessary, unbalanced and clearly in favour of duck shooters and deer hunters who make up a tiny proportion of the population. They are designed to restrict the access of citizens who want to be able to see what is happening on our wetlands during the duck season. They restrict anybody who is not a licensed duck shooter from being closer than 25 metres from the water between sunset and 10.00 a.m. on any day during the whole of the duck shooting season. That in effect keeps out anybody else who wants to go into our state game reserves and pursue an activity that is not duck shooting — for example, photography of our native water birds, which is something I think is a better use of state game reserves and promotes ecotourism.

Just how unbalanced these new regulations are can be seen throughout the documents and the commentary on those documents. By that I mean documents on the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) website and the commentary that is spread throughout the regulatory impact statement (RIS) that was prepared for these new game regulations. There is so much to say about the statements and assumptions in the regulatory impact statement — for example, there is little mention of the welfare of animals or native species, which outside of shooting season are protected. However, due to time constraints I will not be able to say all I would like. I refer people who are interested in this subject to the regulatory impact statement.

The RIS admits that in almost all instances the new regulations reduce the regulatory burden on shooters, apart from the closing of two areas in Warburton and Mount Timbertop to duck hunting. The new regulations are about making it easier for duck shooters and deer hunters, and they do not take into account the aims that I mentioned earlier of humane and safe hunting, competency and accountability, and whatever sustainable and equitable management of game resources actually means. None of those aims are furthered by these new regulations.

I will go through what the changes are, as outlined in the game hunting section of the DPI website. At this point I have to state that it is an absolutely retrograde step that the oversight of the duck-hunting season and of hunting in general has been moved from the Department of Sustainability and Environment to the Department of Primary Industries. The promulgation of these new regulations is proof of that. The new game hunting unit inside DPI is only there to facilitate hunting, not to facilitate the other aims that I mentioned

before. The new unit aims to reduce the regulations that hunters have to follow. It is worth noting that many of the staff of the DPI game hunting unit are duck shooters, and some of them are paid up members of Field and Game Australia. They are proponents of shooting not only in their work life but also in their private life.

In terms of the new game licences the DPI website says:

Changes have been introduced to better facilitate participation in game hunting by junior hunters (aged 12–17 inclusive) and non-residents of Australia.

That does not further any of the aims which the regulations are meant to further, such as competency and accountability, safety and humane hunting of animals. The website goes on:

These include:

exempting juniors from paying a game licence fee;

creating a new once-off, one-year 'provisional' game licence to allow juniors (12–17 years old) to hunt under adult supervision without sitting the waterfowl identification test or the hound hunting test;

People aged as young as 12 will be able to be on the wetland shooting at ducks without knowing which waterfowl are and are not able to be shot. Who knows what level of competency in handling a firearm those juniors will have, because there is nothing in the regulations requiring them to have any. The list of the changes goes on:

creating a new 14-day non-resident of Australia game licence to facilitate game hunting by international visitors to Australia;

creating a new seven-day game bird farm hunting licence that will be free of charge.

Again, the non-residents will not have to know which birds are permitted to be shot during the duck-hunting season and which are not. These changes will also apply to the hunting of deer and the hunting of any animals in the various seasons.

On hunting methods the website says:

A number of changes to hunting methods have been made, including:

revising the minimum specifications for firearms and archery equipment to reflect advances in technology;

Archery and the use of bows and arrows to shoot animals should be completely banned. Even the most competent user of a bow and arrow cannot guarantee that every time they use it they will be shooting an animal in a humane way, even if we do not want to

argue about what that means. It should be completely banned, but instead it is being deregulated. The website goes on:

allowing smoothbore firearms for hunting deer as long as they are fitted with appropriate sights;

allowing the use of blanks to aid in gundog training;

allowing the use of some electronic devices (e.g. GPS tracking collars for hounds, motorised decoys for duck hunting, electronic game calls) —

I will go to noises in the wetlands later in my contribution —

updating the non-toxic shot list for duck hunting to reflect advances in technology.

That is probably not as controversial, but it is still not welcome, because there are exemptions under the current regulations allowing some use of lead shot. Lead shot should not be allowed.

With regard to sambar deer hunting with the use of hounds the website says:

Key changes include:

allowing harriers to be used for hound hunting ...

prescribing height and breed standards in the regulations;

allowing up to three pups in training in addition to the existing pack limit of five hounds;

The pack limit of five hounds is supposedly in place for humane hunting. However, hunting animals using dogs is not humane and should be outlawed, rather than allowing untrained puppies to be added to the pack. The website goes on:

allowing up to two additional junior hunters or two international hunters —

who have not sat the waterfowl identification test —

to hunt without being considered part of the maximum team size of 10;

the start of the hound hunting season has now been set at 1 April each year;

hounds will only have to be assessed once after 12 months of age and will be registered for life;

hound identification requirements have been simplified —

that is, deregulated. The website also says:

A new category of approved 'deer hunting dogs' has been introduced to allow dogs other than hounds and gun dogs to be used for hunting all game deer species other than hog deer. These dogs are mostly terrier breeds.

With the exception of hog deer, all deer species may now be hunted with the aid of gun dogs and deer hunting dogs throughout the state ... An additional four gun dog breeds have been approved for deer hunting.

The DPI game regulations go on to say that it is an offence for dogs to maim or attack wildlife. That is good, but I note that I am more than halfway through the regulations and I have found only one good thing so far.

The only other good thing is the closure of two areas to deer hunting, which I mentioned before. This was stated by DPI in its regulatory impact statement and is the only measure that does not reduce the regulatory burden on shooters.

In addition to all of this the regulations will extend the red deer open season from two months to the whole of the year and remove the requirement to return unused hog deer tags. In the past if a deer hunter shot a hog deer, they had to tag it. If they did not shoot them within the season, they had to return the tags so that the government would know how many had been shot and so they would not be traded to other people. If you remove the requirement for those tags to not be returned, that is exactly what will happen, which is contrary to competency, accountability and sustainable management of game reserve resources.

As I mentioned earlier, the exclusion boundary during the duck-hunting season has been increased from 5 metres to 25 metres from the shoreline. This will apply to all 186 state game reserves and 41 other important duck-hunting wetlands.

That is the list of changes. None of them can be supported as promoting sustainable and equitable management of gaming resources, humane and safe hunting or competency and accountability.

A lot of attention has been given to the changes to the exclusion zone during the duck-hunting season. That is probably the most significant change that has been put forward. The government is now saying that it is about public safety. In the 26 years that people have been monitoring what is going on with duck shooters and rescuers have been rescuing injured birds from the water, there have not been that many incidents. I know from experience that duck rescuers are very organised; they do not get involved in confrontations. The regulations requiring them to stay 25 metres away from the water are completely unnecessary and are simply there to help duck hunters — or duck shooters; ducks are not hunted, they are shot. There is no hunting involved; they are indiscriminately shot as they fly in the air, and it is very cruel.

We know that at least one in four of those birds is injured, often flying away to die of their wounds elsewhere. Members of the Coalition Against Duck Shooting and Wildlife Victoria and others go to the wetlands every year and spend many hours of their time going into the water to rescue injured birds. Under the current regulations duck shooters are meant to retrieve these birds from the water, but many of them do not. There is also the issue of birds flying off and being found later. Dedicated people take these birds to the veterinary sites that are set up near the water and try to save them from dying from their wounds. That is a legitimate activity. Despite the fact that the Department of Primary Industries and the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Mr Walsh, tried to make out that this is an illegitimate activity, it is not illegitimate. Ordinary members of the public have every right to oppose duck shooting and rescue injured birds.

There is absolutely no reason for the extension from 5 metres to 25 metres or to include it for the entire three-month duck season, which runs from 16 March to 10 June this year. People need to realise it is not just duck rescuers who will not be able to go anywhere near the shoreline; it is any member of the public who is not a licensed shooter. There are only about 20 000 licensed shooters in Victoria, or 0.04 per cent of the population, and they are not even all there throughout the duck shooting season. A few of them come out on the opening weekend and a whole lot less of them come out for the rest of the season, so for them to get exclusive rights to 186 state game reserves and 41 important wetlands while the rest of the citizenry of Victoria is excluded is absolutely outrageous, unnecessary and imbalanced.

I would like to make mention of *Victoria Government Gazette* S311 of Monday, 10 December 2012, which was lodged by the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Peter Walsh, and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Ryan Smith. Members might want to read this issue of the government gazette. It is not comprehensive and does not include all of the changes in the regulations. If somebody thinks they will be able to find out what is going on by reading the government gazette, they will be disappointed. It has quite a bit of commentary about the whys and wherefores. I would have thought that notices in the government gazette should be dry and not include opinion and commentary. I will not take up any more time mentioning that; suffice it to say that I do not think it is good enough.

I have been reading through the submission of the Barristers Animal Welfare Panel on the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012. It stated that:

The proposed regulations appear to do little more than promote the growth of the game hunting industry by reducing the regulatory burden imposed on existing hunters, and facilitate the entry of new and less experienced hunters. In so doing, the regulations unfortunately result in an increased likelihood of injury to wildlife and fail miserably to meet, and in fact are contradictory to, the government's objectives of ensuring humane and ethical hunting opportunities, not to mention broader government objectives of ensuring and protecting animal welfare.

The submission also notes that the scope of the RIS did not allow for the banning of duck shooting. We know that more than 8 in 10 Victorians are opposed to duck shooting. If we were to walk down Spring Street and stop the first 10 people who walk past, at least 8 of them would be opposed to this activity. The fact that duck shooting is still allowed to continue in Victoria when it has been banned in other states for so long is a disgrace. These regulations make it easier for young and inexperienced people to be out there with shotguns. They have no experience of firearms and no idea of what they are allowed to shoot and what they are not. This is despite the fact that already a great number of prohibited birds are shot every season, including swans, ducks, pelicans and other birds that are not even waterbirds but which end up being caught in the fray.

When I was at Dowd Morass State Game Reserve a couple of years ago I saw some hunters inside the camping area — nowhere near the water — shooting other birds in the car park with their shotguns. Lots of people were milling around the car park just walking around. I brought that to the attention of the police and the Department of Primary Industries, who said that it was a state game reserve. They were not concerned about the safety of people. It was quite appalling.

The Barristers Animal Welfare Panel talks about the removal of the requirement for returning hog deer tags. It points out that the penalty for not returning them in New South Wales is 50 penalty units as opposed to 20 penalty units in Victoria. It may not even be a requirement once these regulations are allowed. The extension of the sambar deer hunting season to being all year round, will just mean there are people in state game reserves and other areas hunting deer so that ordinary citizens who enter those areas will have to be looking out for deer hunters armed with rifles and sights et cetera.

The other day I was reading a story in the *Australian* about the missing general manager of HM Prison Barwon, David Prideaux. The article quoted Rod Drew, the chief executive officer of Field and Game Australia, who was talking about the deer hunters wearing bright orange colours to prevent them from being shot by other deer hunters, which does happen.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

Ms PENNICUIK — It is not a laughing matter; people have been shot. In fact just recently a young person shot their father in a car in New South Wales, and there was a story I heard overnight of some terrible activities by shooters — but even the president of Field and Game said that just wearing bright colours will not prevent you from being shot by another hunter, and that is a risk you take hunting. That is fabulous!

The Barristers Animal Welfare Panel made quite a good submission and pointed out some of the problems I have already gone through. It is interesting to look at these regulations in terms of economics and their inadequacy in terms of the regulatory impact statement. The regulatory impact statement was approved, passed, endorsed — whatever word you want to use — by the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC). However, VCEC says:

... VCEC's advice that the RIS is adequate does not represent an endorsement of the proposal.

In providing this advice, the VCEC notes that the analysis of fees options in the RIS is focused on the level of cost recovery and that subjective judgements are made regarding the impact of these options — in terms of efficiency, equity and effectiveness — to determine the preferred approach.

It is hardly a ringing endorsement of the RIS.

The group Economists at Large has done an analysis of the regulatory impact statement. It starts out by saying:

The information contained in the RIS is inappropriate for decision-making purposes due to the existence of severe methodological deficiencies and the failure to present evidence within a meaningful context. The approach used in the RIS is inconsistent with general economic practice.

...

The RIS claims that benefits of \$96 million associated with expenditure by hunters should be included when the correct measure of benefit, consumer surplus, suggests benefits of \$10.8 million to \$17.6 million.

It has overestimated the benefits ninefold. For example, it says:

The RIS carries out these steps, but in a manner which the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC) described as 'subjective'.

It seems to propose a conclusion that the continuation of hunting is in the interests of Victoria when it says:

... the identification of relevant costs and benefits of the various regulatory proposals uses methods contrary to economic best practice, as summarised in the 'preferred option' section of the RIS ...

...

The statement demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of standard economic analysis and the appropriate methods of calculating costs and benefits. It completely ignores the existence of external costs associated with hunting and conflates expenditure on an activity with a net increase in economic welfare.

For example:

The \$96 million figure cited above comes from an unpublished 2008 survey of hunters' expenditure. When conducting cost-benefit analysis for the Victorian community, it is not appropriate to simply conflate the expenditure of a group with the benefit of an activity to the community for the simple reason that if money were not spent on one activity it would instead be spent on another activity. That is, if hunting was banned the money spent by hunters would not be 'lost' to the Victorian economy, rather, it would be spent on something else.

The Department of Treasury and Finance are clear on this point:

When assessing costs and benefits, it is important to identify those that are purely transfers (or redistribution) from one group of the community to another, and those which do not lead to an overall increase or decrease in costs/benefits when considered from the viewpoint of society as a whole.

The Department of Primary Industries in its RIS does not even follow Department of Treasury and Finance guidelines. Further, the report states:

If the Parliament of Victoria is to be well informed before making a decision on the new hunting regulations the authors of the RIS need to conduct a non-market valuation study of the value Victorians place on ducks and duck hunting to understand if the regulations are indeed efficient.

It also comments on the multi criteria analysis (MCA), when it states:

MCA is not a methodology favoured by economists due to its subjective and largely arbitrary methodology and lack of theoretical rigour. The Department of Treasury and Finance is also of this opinion ...

That is what the authors of the RIS relied on, so we have a problem with the regulatory impact statement, not to mention everything else.

Returning to the topic of what happens in the wetlands during the duck shooting season, I will go through some comments made by His Honour Magistrate P. Mealy in the Magistrates Court on 7 June 2012 in regard to some duck rescuers who were charged by DPI and police. I have picked out a few of the things he said — amongst many other things — from the transcript of proceedings that I think are apposite in pointing out how unbalanced and skewed is the behaviour of the authorities on the wetlands towards arresting rescuers and not necessarily making sure that shooters conform with regulations. He said on page 8 of the transcript:

I am not satisfied that the use by him —
the rescuer —

of a whistle and flag on all the evidence relevantly delayed,
impeded, obstructed or prevented ...

the shooter —

in hunting or taking game. In respect of the charges of harassment, on all of the evidence I am not satisfied that any singing or laughing by the accused constituted a constant molestation or continuing molestation or persecution ... Those charges are dismissed.

The evidence was that flags being waved seem to have no effect on birds. The magistrate continued:

It could not be said that prior to the actions of those accused, any sense of calmness for wildlife was likely to have existed. The evidence suggests that at the time they became involved on the wetlands there had been noises I have earlier referred to —

such as gunshots —

already likely to have caused a state of anxiety and disturbance to wildlife. In the sense of wildlife being interfered with in a settled course, a state of calmness is perhaps not required ... The only evidence of the distance at which a change in the direction of birds occurred ... was given by ...

one hunter. The magistrate continued:

These charges are dismissed. Each of the accused ... were charged with operating noise-producing equipment, mainly the use of whistles.

This is in the Magistrates Court — people charged with using whistles!

These charges relate to the use in the proximity of hunters engaged in shooting ... Relevant here is whether the use of whistles caused unreasonable inconvenience or nuisance ... Insofar as these charges, in respect of these charges, the standard to be applied must relate to a reasonable person ... The standard is not to be considered in the context of a domestic, residential or industrial setting ... I am satisfied that the use of whistles by the accused was such as to cause —

a nuisance to the shooters. The magistrate also stated:

... of course the use of whistles by the accused could not be considered by shooters to be a nuisance or inconvenience when used in an effort to warn off a non-game species as the shooters could have no intent to shoot non-game species ... this charge must be considered an alternative and is struck out.

In relation to the charge of being within 10 metres of a shooter the magistrate stated:

... an officer of the department gave evidence estimating the distance of the accused from ...

the shooter —

at 2 to 3 metres. He said 'that was a bit of a guess' ... The evidence of distances is so unsatisfactory that I am not satisfied these charges are proved and they are dismissed.

He said that another witness:

... ventured his opinion of the end motive of the rescuers.

The witness believed that one of the rescuers:

... had dead birds in her possession for the purposes of dumping them on the steps of the state Parliament.

The magistrate said:

If the department was concerned to ensure that hunters complied with the conditions of their licences it might be interested to ascertain details of unrecovered dead birds and the number and species of the birds involved. That might provide the department with valued educative material.

The magistrate also said:

It was unfortunate that the credibility of rescuers was sought to be undermined by the highlighting of the fact that they had not arranged for a veterinarian to be present at the wetlands to care for any injured wildlife, the inference being that they had little interest in injured wildlife. Given the responsibilities of the department, it might have been expected that it would have made arrangements for a veterinarian rather than the rescuers.

He went on to say:

I have difficulty with the proposition that the department officers made inquiries of the hunters itself reveals that, in fact, the persons with ...

a hunter —

were not hunters because their credentials, apparently even on the evidence of all department officers, were not inspected. They were not asked for any, yet they were classified as hunters and they were operating noise-producing equipment, or one of them was, contrary to the regulations yet weren't dragged kicking and screaming to this court charged with any offence. Yet ...

the defendants —

have now been found guilty in respect of that self-same offence which was not something levelled against the group with —

the hunter. The magistrate, talking about the ridiculous charges that were put by the department against the defendants, said:

Why is it so? Why is there such inequality?

In summing up the magistrate said:

Considering the totality of this matter I can't ignore the fact that certain of the accused suffered certain indignities in being transported by police to Kerang for the purposes of sitting there and doing nothing till they were bailed; there being on the evidence no useful purpose for them being so taken; their not having been it seems further interviewed at the police

station but simply, it seems, for the purposes of inconvenience; the fact that ...

one defendant —

who was delayed on the shore claimed to department officers to be suffering from the cold yet was required to remain until inquiries had been made of her at that point. Given the narrow basis upon which the charges have been found proved and the fact that the accused have been largely successful and the fact that the department has failed to show even-handedness in its inquiries at the wetlands, makes it inappropriate and inequitable that they be ordered to pay costs.

And so costs were awarded against the department.

This was one of the few cases that made its way to court. The magistrate was completely scathing about the unbalanced, unequal way that duck rescuers were treated by the department and basically threw it all out. The only charge remaining was making noise with whistles, for which they got a good behaviour bond. Other charges, such as failing to kill a wounded animal, which is actually the responsibility of shooters if they shoot a bird and wound it, were thrown out of court. We have evidence in the Magistrates Court of how uneven it all is.

I will finish by referring to some comments made by Mr Walsh on ABC regional radio a couple of months ago. He said that if people go in, they run the risk of being arrested and that agencies and police are there to make sure protesters adhere to the law. That is what he said. He did not mention that agencies are there to make sure that shooters adhere to the law, just that protesters should. Calling them protesters is one thing — obviously they do not agree with duck shooting — but they are there to rescue wounded birds. The minister said that they do not go there with good intent; some go there to make mischief. In an answer to the interviewer he said that in general, shooters do not make — —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms PENNICUIK — I do deny that; it is not my experience.

I know that time is short today, and I have had to rush through the changes to the wildlife regulations. There is an awful lot more I could say if I were to pick out the flaws with the regulatory impact statement — —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms PENNICUIK — I would be interested to know whether Mr Ramsay has read that document, but I will desist from going through it. All of the new regulations are unnecessary and unbalanced and should not be supported by this house, and that is why I have moved

this disallowance motion today. I commend the motion to the house.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I will not support the motion moved today by Ms Pennicuik, and my stance goes back to another conversation when Ms Pennicuik raised the issue on 16 June 2011. This is basically a philosophical argument. The Greens have a particular view about hunting, and Ms Pennicuik is a strong advocate for animal rights, as am I. I have some empathy for the position of anyone who seeks to prevent cruelty to animals, but what we have before us today is a disallowance motion on what is effectively a review of the regulations that have been through a stringent process around their modernisation. They talk about the licensing and testing requirements, the dates, the bag limits, the methods of hunting and the presence of hunters. The majority of the regulations stay pretty much the same, and I am just not sure why we are seeing this motion here today except perhaps because its timing is around the duck season and it is a politically motivated motion to gain maximum attention.

The issues around bow and arrow hunting, hounds and gun dogs are all philosophical. Many of these activities are regulated in the extreme, and many people consider them to be sport. Where I come from in rural Victoria there is also a cultural argument around the rights of people's heritage. These are activities they have pursued for generations; they are very much activities of rural communities who get together to enjoy the bush, to camp and to pursue hunting.

While I appreciate the philosophical differences that we see today from Ms Pennicuik, we need to acknowledge that hunting serves a real purpose. Ms Pennicuik talked about the hunting of hog deer. I can only recite what I have seen in the bush in the high country where deer are feral animals and we struggle to manage them. I can highlight a case where the federal Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, took his entourage to the high country to inspect a high cattle grazing site and mistook a deer wallow for the site of cattle damage. Deer cause damage to our bush. The wallowing of deer in the mossy bogs is not a good thing for our high country. They are difficult to eradicate, and in my view hunters are assisting us in the protection of our biodiversity and of our bush. There are species there that will be impacted on if these animal numbers are allowed to explode even further, and there are enormous numbers of deer in many areas. We need to understand that they need to be controlled.

If we look at what is delivered to Victoria through hunting and its ancillaries, we are looking at something

like 43 000 licensed game hunters in Victoria. The economic contribution to the state is estimated to be more than \$100 million annually. That ancillary spending is around safety equipment, petrol, food, accommodation and camping gear. Most people who pursue these sports are pretty well equipped; they are certainly regulated. They do not go into it in a half-hearted way. The coalition government encourages hunters to make the most of the opportunities to hunt, fish and enjoy the recreational activities of the bush, but there are conditions to that. There is a bag limit of 10 game ducks, which includes no more than two Australasian blue-winged shovelers, and anyone in Victoria who wishes to go duck hunting must pass a waterfowl identification test, which examines a hunter's ability to identify waterfowl species.

We need to ensure the sustainability of species and we need to determine the sustainability of those activities. We need to make sure that the species that are non-game birds are not taken mistakenly. When a similar motion came to the house I said that obviously I support the right of people to protest in a safe and responsible way, but I certainly do not support protesters who act illegally, who put people at risk and who cause grief to those who are conducting themselves in a lawful manner.

I would like to recite the case of David Mould and Kelly Lachman, who were convicted and fined \$9000 each on charges from the opening weekend of the 2010 Victorian duck-hunting season. The charges included hindering, obstructing legitimate and licensed hunters, indecent language and theft. Considerable costs were awarded against the pair. This should send a warning to people who are entitled to lawful protest, but when an unlawful activity occurs and their opinion or their politics gets in the way of their better judgement and illegal activities occur, then we need to have a really good look at ourselves.

This government has worked to curb illegal activity. We want to increase the safety of all participants in what is a legal activity. We are hoping when the 2013 duck season opens it will be safe for everybody. We hope people will be able to enjoy lawful activities. If people are out there protesting, we hope they will think twice about putting themselves or others in danger. In a recent *Weekly Times* survey 14 000 people voted, which is a massive response to any sort of poll. This poll concerned whether duck-hunting season should continue. About 60 per cent of respondents said it should continue.

The regulations we are talking about today were prepared following public consultation; they have been through the proper process. I know Ms Pennicuik is

very process driven, and I respect that about her approach to advocacy. Over a period of 31 days more than 500 people were consulted and submissions were received on the regulatory impact statements. All of the issues were taken into account. This a philosophical argument. It is time for political positions. The Liberal Party has a history of biodiversity, but Sir Henry Bolte was also a patron of field and game during his term as Premier. Other patrons of field and game include former Governor Sir Rohan Delacombe, former Prime Minister the Honourable Malcolm Fraser and, more recently, the Honourable Tom Austin.

Under Henry Bolte's watch the shooters licence was implemented. That was quickly established in 1959. The first ever funds that were made available for game and wildlife management also occurred while Henry Bolte was Premier. Important areas of wildlife habitat were purchased and a game research station now established at Serendip near Lara. It is important to recognise the history of conservation. It is easy for the Greens to grab space on this issue, but historically and currently the Liberal Party are advocates of ensuring that biodiversity is protected. That does not just occur; obviously some thought has to be put into it.

In concluding, I will quote from an article to provide a snapshot of an alternate view from those expressed in Brunswick or Footscray. In many regional areas hunting is an activity that is intrinsic to cultures and communities. I will read an excerpt from the *Bendigo Advertiser*, which is headed 'Duck hunt fervour as season nears'. The article states:

About 60 Bendigo residents are signing up for firearm licences each month, with duck hunters saying there is stronger local interest in shooting than ever.

The 2013 duck-hunting season opens on 16 March, with Lake Buloke, Kerang and other wetlands expected to be busy with duck shooters. Owner of Hartley's Hunting and Fishing in Bendigo, Lindsay Hamley, said more people were getting into hunting and signing up for gun licences.

'There's plenty of people coming in; in Bendigo alone there's about 60 new people getting licences a month', he said.

'Not all of them will go duck hunting but I think a lot of people are interested. The conditions will be good in the upcoming season with a lot of water around'.

That is also an important point to note. After effectively 10 years of drought we have had a couple of very good wet seasons. Conditions are good, and duck numbers are up. Game duck numbers are at their fourth highest level in 30 years. In terms of sustainability and a considered approach to this issue, the Liberal-Nationals coalition is looking out for Victorians, looking out for cultural interests and looking out for biodiversity in a balanced way. I will not say much more today as I

know there are other speakers waiting to contribute, but we certainly will not be supporting the motion before us today.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — I find it interesting that Mrs Petrovich is the lead speaker for the government and she is getting stuck into the Greens, even though she is here courtesy of Greens preferences. Perhaps that is one of the true ironies of how this Parliament works.

Ms Pennicuik has spoken with passion and at some length on this motion, as has Mrs Petrovich. A couple of things need to be said about the motion. A series of regulations were to expire and those regulations were extended. A series of regulations amended the previous regulations. Ms Pennicuik discussed the amendments she has issues with at some length. Mrs Petrovich explained at some length why the amendments were being implemented. We cannot escape from the fact that this is effectively the same debate that has gone on for some decades. The debate goes to the balance between the rights of someone to be a sporting shooter and the rights of animals. Some of that debate changes by nuance, but some of it is a fundamental philosophical debate about which there are very strong views in the community.

I will say a few things on this. I will contradict Mrs Petrovich to the extent that sporting shooters do not just exist in country Victoria. There are a lot of sporting shooters in my electorate and other electorates as well. However, our side of the house also has concerns about the government's consultation process on this issue. There is a philosophical debate in the community on this issue that Solomon would not have the wisdom to cut between, and governments have to make choices. Nevertheless we have issues with the consultation process. Many opponents of duck hunting would say this consultation process has occurred very quickly. The government referred to a reasoned consultation, but it has been put to me and to Lisa Neville, the member for Bellarine in the other place and shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change, that consultation was lacking on this issue.

In the end it comes down to some regulations that have been put in place. Probably the most controversial part of the regulations is that balance between protest and safety, and while we are always very anxious with regard to anything that can be seen to make it more difficult for people to express a legitimate protest, the events of last year highlighted for us that the balance on that has to be about safety as well.

It is always important to have debates on this issue, and it is always important to deal with it, but the Labor Party will vote against Ms Pennicuik's motion to disallow these regulations.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I rise to oppose the motion that the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 be disallowed. I take up the statement Ms Pennicuik made in her contribution that I had not read the motion in detail or the regulations in question and that I did not understand the timing of the motion being introduced this week. I understand these things very well. I know that the duck season starts on Saturday, 16 March, and that the government is presently reviewing the game regulations under the Wildlife Act 1975. It is very timely that Ms Pennicuik has brought this motion to the house only two weeks prior to the opening of the duck season and at the same time as the government is reviewing regulations.

However, the fact is that duck hunting is a lawful activity under the Wildlife Act. Historically it has been supported by both coalition and Labor governments. Today both the coalition and Labor are opposing this motion.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — Having said that, and I am sure Mr Barber will enjoy interjecting throughout the 10 minutes of my contribution, I will state up-front that I am a shooter. I have enjoyed duck shooting over many years, as has my father. On the day I was born my father came to visit my mother at the Royal Children's Hospital after having just purchased a side-by-side Merkel shotgun. He was much more excited about his new gun than he was about the birth of his first son. Throughout my life there has always been a bit of a competition about what or who was the most valuable in our home — that Merkel shotgun or me. However, I take the view that my mother was much more excited about the fact that I was born than my father's purchase.

There is a serious side to this issue. I have long been of the view that the people who spend their lives looking after animals tend to be the most passionate about animal welfare. I always find it interesting when the Greens move motions. I note the Country Fire Authority (CFA) motion of this morning. I suspect that not one member of the Greens has been actively involved in the CFA, and yet here they are making this passionate plea of support for CFA volunteers. They have never actually been involved in a fire front themselves, and they do not have a full understanding of what volunteer fire services are all about. The Greens

have moved a motion about animal welfare, while they have never actually had to look after animals. They have certainly taken a philosophical view about looking after animals.

Ms Pennicuik interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — I know Mr Barber has a very small acreage at Apollo Bay. I suspect it is of a very steep nature. Perhaps goats are suited to that type of terrain. I suspect that it is unlikely that Mr Barber is a hands-on manager of that particular block.

I am digressing. I made a commitment that I would allow a colleague of mine in The Nationals, Mr O'Brien, the opportunity to speak for 5 minutes of the 15 minutes of my contribution.

As I said, historically duck hunting has been supported by both Labor and the coalition. There are regulated duck-hunting seasons in other states, including South Australia and Tasmania. New South Wales hunters obtain permits to hunt ducks for the protection of the commercial rice fields. We know that in Victoria a number of birds cause a huge amount of damage to our agricultural sector. Cockatoos are an example. In dense populations they are known to strip wheatfields; and mountain ducks can cause significant damage to wheatfields.

Duck hunting is a popular recreational activity, with more than 41 000 people licensed to hunt game in Victoria. Of those, about 24 000 are licensed duck hunters. There has been a 41 per cent increase in the number of game hunters over the last decade, so it is a sport with increasing numbers of participants. That is why we have introduced a number of requirements for licensed duck hunters to abide by in relation to the identification of birds, bag limits and the time of the duck-hunting season itself.

Prior to duck season being declared in Victoria, a substantial survey of duck numbers is undertaken to ascertain whether duck numbers can be sustained. Based on the analysis of relevant environmental indicators, such as duck numbers and distribution, water levels in wetlands and breeding indices, the government may modify the seasonal arrangements to ensure that duck hunting remains sustainable. That has been confirmed by Mrs Petrovich. The government can consider which, if any, wetlands should be excluded from hunting during the duck season if there is a predominance of protected or vulnerable duck species in those wetlands.

In 2012 the government declared a full 12-week duck season. We knew that duck numbers were higher.

There was a significant amount of water in our wetlands, which created the right environment for an increase in duck populations. Therefore for 2012 a 12-week season for duck hunting was declared from Saturday, 17 March, to Monday, 11 June. I realise that we are now in a new era of 2013, and I understand that in two weeks the duck season will officially be declared open.

There are eight species of native duck that may be hunted during the open season. I will name those ducks for the reason that a significant identification test has to be passed by those who wish to shoot ducks. There are the Pacific black duck, the grey teal, the mountain duck, the wood duck, the chestnut teal, the blue-winged shoveler, the hardhead and the pink-eared duck. As I said, as a measure of their ability to identify game and non-game waterbirds, all duck hunters are required to undertake and pass the waterfowl identification test prior to entering the field. The use of lead shot is also prohibited. Only non-toxic alternatives may be used.

Despite large duck populations, it is estimated that the take of ducks during the previous season was lower following the floods as many ducks flew north just prior to the opening of the season.

I could go on. Some of this information is relevant and some of it is a year old, but the important points to remember are that duck hunting is legal in Victoria, it is a sport that is enjoyed by 41 000-odd Victorians; it generates about \$93 million for the community, significant tests and safeguards have been put in place to make sure that shooters know what they are shooting at, the shooting occurs within a specific period of time, and there are bag limits. One of the concerns we have, apart from the welfare of the ducks — and there is significant oversight of that in the wetlands during the duck season by the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and rangers — is to make sure that shooters comply with the regulations and requirements of shooting ducks during a duck season. We also want to make sure that ducks, if they are maimed or suffer in any way, are disposed of in a humane manner, and that the shooter who does transgress is fined or appropriate action is taken against them in relation to non-compliance.

I agree with Ms Pennicuik that we all have to play by the rules. They are there for a purpose, and that is to make sure that the birds are protected in a humane way during duck season when it is legal to shoot ducks. What we do not have control over is the protesters who actually put themselves in danger when they enter, in many cases illegally, private farmland. I have firsthand

experience of this, because there are many shooters who, as Mr Lenders says, come from rural Victoria and also from the city. They want to come down and enjoy the private wetlands, whether it is on my property, Mr O'Brien's, Mrs Petrovich's or Mr Koch's. We have the capacity to permit shooters of interest to come onto our properties and shoot ducks during legally during specified times.

That has not prevented some protesters from illegally entering private property and trying to stop or disrupt the legal practice of shooting ducks during the specified shooting season. Only last year we saw on television protesters putting themselves and others in danger by trying to disrupt this practice in the public wetlands. That seems to me to be a far worse crime than the shooting of ducks itself. You actually had humans placing themselves in danger of being shot and also putting the shooters in danger by interrupting the shooters' line of sight.

There are a number of issues around the duck season. It is important to note, as I said, that we have rules and regulations in place to protect both the shooters and the birds, but unfortunately we do not have any capacity to provide protection to those protesters who put themselves and others in danger because of the way they behave. I strongly recommend that if Ms Pennicuik and her ilk are wanting to protest during this duck season, they do so in a manner that does not place themselves or others in danger in public wetlands or even private lands. I oppose this motion.

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I also rise to oppose the motion. It is a rather simplistic motion, and it encompasses much of the lack of coherence in the Greens debates on this issue and many others. As my colleague Mr Ramsay has outlined, there is a comprehensive set of rules — that is, the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012. They are the rules that have been carefully formulated throughout the debates that have taken place on this serious issue over many years, and they are the rules that Ms Pennicuik seeks to disallow. By supporting this notion of banning and disallowing absolutely everything, she is actually going for a deregulated market, and many of the protections afforded by the current regulations that Mrs Petrovich, the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security and others have spoken in favour of would also disappear. It would become a case of having no wildlife regulations. The minister and, as was outlined by Mrs Petrovich, this government believe in listening to the people who are most closely involved in the industry and proceeding on the assumption that those involved in that industry also care for the welfare of animals.

When the Greens rise to speak on any animal welfare bill there is an assumption — and the Acting President, Ms Crozier, who was in the chamber at the commencement of this debate, put this very well — that those who oppose their extremist views do not care about the welfare of animals. It is a false assumption and it is based on an arrogance that only those who seek to ban all farming of animals, all consumption of meat and, yes, all hunting of game in Victoria have a right to speak out on animal welfare. It is a false assumption because the truth, as Mr Ramsay pointed out, is that many people in rural western Victoria and other parts of the state — including metropolitan areas, as Mr Lenders pointed out — who engage in these hunting activities do so with animal welfare in mind.

We need to start declassifying some of the people involved in the Greens movement, because we have seen the latest attempt by the federal leader of the Greens, Christine Milne, to ingratiate herself and her party with the rural movement and to seek to find a new demographic, given the difficulties that party has in holding onto its own in metropolitan Melbourne with the rise of the Labor Party. We will see how that trick works.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr O'BRIEN — What we see is the grabbing of these extremist movements. This is no clearer than in Mr Barber's contributions on the kangaroo debate that he and I have been having in the public domain, where he does not quote what I have said, which is that we would look at using the existing kangaroo carcasses. He prefers to put out a misquote that we are seeking an increase in the number of kangaroos that are killed. He does that to stir up the extremist elements of his movement that do not want any of us to eat meat. Let us face it: they are out there. Some of them are called vegans and I respect their view. Mr Watt, the member for Burwood in the other place, is vegan and proud of it. He has a healthy diet and has no problems.

Mr Barber — He must be an extremist.

Mr O'BRIEN — He is not an extremist, but some people in that camp and some people in the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animal movement do not want to allow the consumption of meat by human beings.

The Greens seek to grab every issue, such as this one, and overplay it. That includes Mr Barber's misrepresentations on the position I had put on the careful use of kangaroo carcasses — kangaroos that have already been killed, that are dead and that are

lying to waste in paddocks. Mr Barber confuses the argument amongst his own base, because there is not just one type of Green; there is a whole spectrum, including the extremist ends. There are other Greens who believe in the sustainable use of our native resources for consumption, as has been done by human beings for millennia. Instead what we see is the distortion of arguments by an extremist end.

I had some involvement a long time ago with some of the campaigners for this issue. I know Mr Levy is here in the chamber. I also know Mr Selleck, a colleague of mine, has worked with Mr Levy to put his view. In his outspoken way Mr Levy has made many clear statements which have resulted in a tightening of regulations and many of the improvements that are outlined. We would keep in place the balanced regulations that Minister Walsh has outlined, that Mrs Petrovich has explained and that Mr Lenders supports. We again wish that the Greens' extremist arguments could be consigned to the dustbins of history. With that, I oppose the motion.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank Mrs Petrovich, Mr Lenders, Mr Ramsay and Mr O'Brien for speaking on my motion. I will go to a few points made by Mrs Petrovich. She said that deer do damage and hunters help to keep the deer population down.

Mr Barber — No evidence.

Ms PENNICUIK — My response to that is that there is no evidence, as Mr Barber says. Also, it is not the job of recreational shooters to deal with deer in our state reserves; it should be the government's job to deal with that issue.

Mrs Petrovich mentioned the number of submissions made during the regulatory impact statement process. I assume a lot of those submissions came from a particular section of the community. She also mentioned a particular section of the community whose members are pro-hunting and are very organised in putting in submissions. She also mentioned a *Weekly Times* survey on whether people supported duck shooting. I am advised that the majority of people surveyed were opposed to duck shooting, as they are in the community.

I am sorry the ALP did not see its way clear to supporting this disallowance motion, given the way I outlined the unnecessary and unbalanced changes to the regulations that have been made.

Mr Ramsay said that people put themselves in danger. My experience is that that is not generally the case but

those people are very careful. Rescuers on the wetlands are very careful, so I do not know where he gets that from. I do not think he has ever been there for those particular activities.

An honourable member — He has seen it on TV.

Ms PENNICUIK — If he has seen it on TV, then it must be right.

Mr O'Brien said that this motion is a simplistic motion. I point out to him that regulations made under this section of the Wildlife Act, may be disallowed in whole or in part by a resolution of either house of Parliament.

He also mentioned that opposition to duck shooting is an extremist view. I make the point that it is not an extremist view. A huge majority of Victorians, including those who live in rural and regional Victoria, are opposed to duck shooting — consistently about 85 per cent of people in the polls. When I go to places such as Donald, for example, I speak to many people who wish duck season did not happen and who are upset by the incursion of duck shooters into their town. You cannot portray everybody living in those particular areas where the state game reserves are as being in favour of the activities; in fact that is not the case.

With that, I regret that members are not able to support the motion, but I commend it to the house.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 3

Barber, Mr (*Teller*)
Hartland, Ms (*Teller*)
Pennicuik, Ms

Noes, 37

Atkinson, Mr	Lenders, Mr
Broad, Ms	Lovell, Ms
Coote, Mrs	Mikakos, Ms
Crozier, Ms	O'Brien, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	O'Donohue, Mr
Darveniza, Ms	Ondarchie, Mr
Davis, Mr D.	Pakula, Mr
Davis, Mr P.	Petrovich, Mrs
Drum, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Eideh, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Pulford, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Elsbury, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Finn, Mr	Scheffer, Mr
Guy, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Hall, Mr	Tarlamis, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Tee, Mr
Koch, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Tierney, Ms
Kronberg, Mrs	Viney, Mr
Leane, Mr	

Motion negatived.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, 19 March 2013, a copy of the Department of Transport’s *Network Revenue Protection Plan* for the 2012–13 financial year.

This is a motion requesting the tabling in the house of a document known as the *Network Revenue Protection Plan* for the current financial year. Earlier versions of this document have been tabled in the house before with no dissent and seemingly little difficulty. This is the document in which the government and the public transport operators lay down their plans for action on fare evasion, and it contains some data on past performance. Of course that very question of fare evasion, ticketing and so forth is a matter of live debate. This document will inform the debate, and I anticipate that since a similar document was tabled last year and I believe the year before there should be no dissent from members of the house on my motion.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The opposition is more than happy to support Mr Barber’s motion, as it is usually supportive of calls for documents. In saying that, we understand that the government has some limitations in certain areas, and we respect that.

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — As anticipated by Mr Barber, the government will not be opposing the motion he has moved. I appreciate that he has acknowledged the government’s preparedness in the past to produce previous versions of this document when requested by the house. As he says, the Network Revenue Protection Plan is obviously an important part of the government’s efforts to minimise fare evasion and to ensure that the revenue that is attached to the system is actually collected. We know that there were many issues associated with the introduction of myki and the directive given by, as I understand it, Mr Pakula as the former Minister for Public Transport to go easy on the collection of revenue from the public transport system as a result of the state of flux that existed with the introduction of myki. I note that the Auditor-General made comments along a similar line in his report of August 2012, *Fare Evasion on Public Transport*, which says on page 19:

the introduction of myki and the start of the new contracts in late 2009 marked the start of a rapid fall in monthly notices. This continued throughout the ‘myki education period’ —

as it is referred to. The report goes on to say:

monthly train notices fell by 28 per cent, from 6400 to 4600;

monthly tram notices fell by 62 per cent, from 6100 to 2350 ...

On page 20 of that report in part 3.3.2 the Auditor-General said:

The decline in effective enforcement from December 2009 can be attributed to:

...

the government’s requirement for leniency in dealing with people using myki being perceived by operators as extending to Metcard users as well;

the absence of any direct financial consequences for the operators as fare evasion rose and then accelerated;

the lack of timely and purposeful oversight by the department to address the lack of effective enforcement on trams and metropolitan trains —

and it goes on. We have a situation here where the Auditor-General has found that as a result of a directive from the former government and insufficient oversight the former government — and the taxpayer — lost significant revenue, which could not then be reinvested back into public transport services. However, I am very pleased that the current government has accepted all the recommendations of the Auditor-General’s report and that in the surveys undertaken by Public Transport Victoria, which take place in May and October each year, we have seen that fare evasion is trending down. On metropolitan trains it is anticipated to be 8.8 per cent, down from 11.7 per cent in May 2012. On trams it is at 10.5 per cent, down from 13.3 per cent.

The buses are also trending in the right direction. These figures were made public in December 2012.

Mr Barber must have missed that one. I am very pleased that as a result of clearer directions from this government and a multifaceted approach, including new advertising campaigns, additional enforcement measures and clearer supervision through government agencies, such as Public Transport Victoria, the trend in this area is tracking in the right way. There is obviously still an issue there, and we as a government want to see that trend continue in the right direction because the revenue that is collected from public transport users is obviously an important source of revenue for funding the public transport network and the public transport system.

With those comments, I repeat that the government does not oppose Mr Barber’s motion 536, with the usual caveats as Mr Leane anticipated. I thank Mr Barber for his comments about the preparedness of the government to provide documents as a result of previous similar motions.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am sure Mr Barber will get his right of reply in a moment — —

An honourable member interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I have some comments I would like to make in relation to the motion Mr Barber has moved this afternoon. It is important that we address, as Mr O’Donohue has pointed out, some issues about the Public Transport Victoria’s Network Revenue Protection Plan in relation to what is occurring on the public transport system. Commuters who travel on our public transport system, whether that be train, tram or bus, will be very pleased to know that the government is focused on delivering those services, and as one would expect it wants those services to run efficiently, avoiding fare evasion wherever possible. I note that the Metlink services agreement requires that Metlink submit an annual Network Revenue Protection Plan to the director of public transport for approval. As I have highlighted, there are four main providers, Metro Trains Melbourne, Yarra Trams, BusVic and V/Line. We need to understand what our commuters are doing in Victoria and how services can be improved.

The principles of the Network Revenue Protection Plan state:

Everyone (except children aged three years and under) who travels on public transport has a legal obligation to have a valid ticket.

When an authorised officer (AO) detects a customer without a valid ticket, the AO has a responsibility and the legal power to issue a report of non-compliance (RONC).

Customer education and information will be provided to ensure that people are aware of the obligations and the means by which they can comply including the availability of tickets.

AOs will conduct themselves according to the legal requirements of the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 ...

As Mr O’Donohue has pointed out, there is particular concern about the number of fare evaders, and it is pleasing to note that that trend is declining. As Mr O’Donohue also highlighted, the Victorian Auditor-General’s report, *Fare Evasion on Public Transport*, August 2012 looked at this issue and made a number of recommendations. The government has accepted all of those recommendations. In that report the Auditor-General recognised the complexity of managing revenue compliance and the need for improved data gathering as well as improved planning and a review of the cost effectiveness of ticketing enforcement across Victoria.

As anyone who travels on our trams, trains and buses would know, there are occasions when you witness fare evasion; it is fairly blatant, I would have to say. I have seen it myself and been pretty astounded at the numbers. I recall an occasion last year after leaving a football game at the MCG when it appeared that a number of people on our train system did not have a valid ticket; I could not say for sure, but it did not seem that they were validating their tickets. It is a huge issue if commuters travel on our public transport system and do not pay accordingly. The figures on lost revenue are in the tens of millions of dollars — approximately \$62 million per annum. That is significant revenue that public transport operators are missing out on and which does not go back into those services.

We have to do more, and I am pleased there has been some education on fare evasion. We have seen the ads — very effective ads, I might add — that Public Transport Victoria is running, hoping to educate commuters about their responsibility, the importance of having a valid ticket and avoiding fare evasion.

As Mr O’Donohue has stated, the government is very pleased with the downward trend in fare evasion. I note that the survey undertaken by Public Transport Victoria in October 2012 showed that evasion rates have continued to fall across the metropolitan network from 11.5 per cent in May 2012 to 9.4 per cent in October 2012. Despite the fact that it is only a couple of percentage points, it is still a fall, and, as Mr O’Donohue highlighted, the figures are trending down, which is very good. However, we still have much to do in relation to addressing the problem of passengers who are not paying their way. We need to do much more to ensure that a significant proportion of fares collected in the future can be put back into public transport services.

We have very good processes in place in relation to gating and staffing of stations. We need only look at the safety at our train stations provided by our protective services officers (PSOs), who have been a great comfort to commuters. I was at the Oakleigh train station last Wednesday night and spoke to the PSOs who were getting a very positive response from commuters. We need to do more in relation to fare evasion and in relation to education and marketing campaigns. However, as Mr O’Donohue said, the government will not be opposing Mr Barber’s motion.

Motion agreed to.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: *Implementation of School Infrastructure Programs*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Implementation of School Infrastructure Programs* of February 2013. As a member of the Education and Training Committee of this Parliament I was shocked to read the findings of the Auditor-General. More than 500 schools are at the point of imminent failure or have already failed.

An estimated \$420 million investment is required right now to bring these schools up to an acceptable standard. This is not small change, but neither is it a fantastic amount. Too many of our kids are trying to obtain an education in run-down, dilapidated buildings. I have visited schools in my own electorate and seen the deterioration of school buildings. It is not fair on the staff — the second lowest paid group of teachers in Australia — who have no choice but to work under these shabby conditions, and it is certainly not fair on the children.

The Auditor-General makes five recommendations. Personally I think recommendation 2, which makes schools accountable for their own maintenance, pours salt on their wounds. After all it is the state bureaucracy that established a convoluted and expensive process for schools to follow in order to access their Building the Education Revolution (BER) allocation or funding from the commonwealth government.

The first recommendation states that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should:

develop and document a comprehensive long-term asset strategy, encompassing plans to address surplus buildings at schools.

That is no doubt with a view to selling off those assets.

The second recommendation — and there are only five in the report — talks about requiring schools to adopt a long-term approach to maintaining their assets and includes the punitive measure that they be held to account.

In my opinion recommendation 3 is a top priority. It states that the department should:

review its asset maintenance funding model to make sure schools are adequately supported in maintaining buildings throughout their life cycles.

The other two recommendations are about evaluating the efficiencies of the public-private partnership model and the delivery and impact of the Victorian schools plan and BER program. Clearly this has worked for some but not all schools in my electorate. There ought to be a minimum uniform standard for all schools.

Auditor-General: *Rating Practices in Local Government*

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I will make some remarks on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Rating Practices in Local Government*, which was tabled in February 2013. It is a good time to be talking about council rates, because all councils are going through their planning processes and casually and informally deciding behind the scenes what level of rate increases they are prepared to accept. They are trying to convince many of the recently elected councillors that any decrease or constraint on proposed rate increases will mean service cuts. That is why this report is so interesting.

The report reveals that the 79 councils in Victoria rely heavily on revenue generated by property-based rates and charges. In 2011–12 councils generated an operating revenue in excess of \$8.18 billion, with rates and charges accounting for \$4.09 billion or 49 per cent of the total. That means that between 2001–02 and 2009–10 — that is, before the change of government — the mean rates per property assessment in Victoria increased an average of 6.3 per cent each and every year. It is basically like a layer cake. It never goes to ground zero; it is layered and increased each and every year. There has been a 6.3 per cent increase each and every year.

According to the Auditor-General this exceeded the 2.9 per cent growth in the CPI in the same period. Councils and peak bodies argue that the CPI does not accurately reflect the pressures on their operations and that the local government cost index is a better reflection. However, the report also found that in the same period there was an average 4.8 per cent per year growth in the local government cost index. There was a 2.9 per cent increase in CPI for each of those years, a 4.8 per cent growth in the local government cost index, but the average rate increase for each of those years was 6.3 per cent, which is well in excess of both indices. The Municipal Association of Victoria would argue that the issues that impacted most heavily on council costs were wages and construction.

The report goes on to make a number of recommendations, which include:

to clarify and standardise key data reporting requirements relating to rates and charges for councils ...

not just from year to year for one council but across various councils.

Recommendation 2 states that the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) should:

in consultation with the Municipal Association of Victoria, review the adequacy of the local government cost index and encourage the use of an agreed benchmark by councils in the annual reporting of rates and charges.

Recommendation 4 states that the DPCD should:

establish a framework to monitor and report on council compliance with the Local Government Act 1989...

I certainly encourage that, not just in terms of rates and charges but in terms of the requirements to comply with other statutory requirements.

Recommendations 5 and 6 state that the DPCD should:

communicate to councils Local Government Victoria's role in the provision of guidance and support to them in rating practices, and clarify Local Government Victoria's expectations of council rating practices and activities;

consider making ratings strategies mandatory and providing updated guidance regarding their content, frequency of review and how ratepayers should be engaged.

Regrettably ratepayers are not effectively engaged. They are often invited to make submissions on the draft budget, but very rarely do they get a response. It is important to treat each submission with respect and dignity and to respond.

I am pleased to see that the minister has placed a high importance on a number of those issues, in particular the development of a mandatory performance reporting framework, which is currently being worked through and which proposes to amend the act, improve rating guidance material and clarify the role of Local Government Victoria with regard to guidance and monitoring of council practice. Enormous improvement can be made in this area. However, councils also need to constrain their own growth and expenditure in deference to the pressure being felt by individuals and the community.

Office of Police Integrity: *Crossing the Line*

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — I will make a brief contribution on the Office of Police Integrity's report *Crossing the Line*. This is the report that investigated the matters surrounding the departure from office of the former Chief Commissioner of Police, Simon

Overland. This report in effect resulted in the resignation of Mr Weston from the position of adviser to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Ryan, and Mr Tilley, the member for Benambra in the other place, from the position of Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Emergency Services. The report found that there was an alleged conspiracy on the part of these people in undermining the office of the Chief Commissioner of Police and that they held discussions with the then deputy Chief Commissioner of Police, Ken Jones, at his home and at other locations.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

Mr VINEY — It could well be true that it was in the office of a barrister who is perhaps well known to members of this house. These discussions took place and in effect resulted in the undermining of the office of chief commissioner and ultimately in his resignation and departure.

What has become apparent in recent days is that this report is perhaps incomplete, because Mr Weston and Mr Tilley have always maintained they were acting under the instruction of the minister for police — the Deputy Premier, Mr Ryan — and it now appears, from various tapes that are being revealed, that perhaps the true position is that Mr Weston and Mr Tilley were acting with the implicit and perhaps explicit understanding and support of the police minister.

A significant body of evidence is now emerging, including tape recordings of Mr Weston saying that Mr Ryan appeared to have lied, which was not denied by Mr Nutt in those conversations. In relation to these conversations it appears that there is a significant lack of confidence in the Deputy Premier and police minister from people who were in the room at the time.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr VINEY — Mr Drum may allege I am making it up. I am relying on evidence from contemporaneous recordings of discussions and conversations that demonstrate that it is very probable that Mr Weston and Mr Tilley were telling the — —

Mr Drum — On a point of order, Acting President, could I ask the member to restate which report he is responding to?

Mr VINEY — What report am I talking to?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! I will deal with the matter, Mr Viney. I do not recognise the point of order. Mr Viney outlined his intentions at the start of his contribution.

Mr VINEY — It is apparent that the perception of the OPI in its report *Crossing the Line* was a good description of what was taking place: the evidence given to it is clearly incomplete. Contemporaneous evidence now shows Mr Weston and Mr Tilley were telling the truth: they were acting under the instruction of the police minister, the Deputy Premier, to undermine the office of the then Chief Commissioner of Police, Mr Overland, to result in his departure, and there was an attempt to make sure that Sir Ken Jones moved into that position.

What is clear from all of this is that this will bring down Mr Ryan, and the reason it will bring him down is because, as always in politics, it was not the offence of getting rid of the chief commissioner that was going to cause the problem; it was the cover-up: his involvement in that matter up to his neck. That is what will bring down Mr Ryan and result in his departure.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee: livability options in outer suburban Melbourne

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to make my contribution in terms of focusing the attention of the house on the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee's report of December 2012 on its inquiry into livability options in outer suburban Melbourne. Frankly, in many ways with its present population of 4.1 million people Melbourne is managing fast growth relatively well, especially and importantly when one takes into consideration that many of the other cities ranked for their livability by the *Economist's* intelligence unit have populations half or even less than of metropolitan Melbourne and its outer suburbs.

Although Melbourne currently holds the title for the world's most livable city, its outer suburbs in the interface council areas face numerous challenges. As Melburnians we should be striving for vibrant and more compact, efficient settlements and development patterns, while providing a diversity of opportunities for living, working and enjoying culture, and to have services delivered close to where people live. So as not to damage the future economic and employment prospects of those living in the outer suburbs, we need to use extreme care not to convert land set aside for employment. Attractive and efficient public transport is difficult to introduce into fast-growing communities. It is almost unachievable because we can never really catch up. This limits this state's ability to respond effectively to growing traffic congestion and to deal with the tyranny of distance experienced by those living in Melbourne's outer suburbs.

We also need to acknowledge the trade-off of continuing urban expansion, which at first solves the problem of housing our fast-growing population. We need to continue to provide stewardship for better investment in the inner metropolitan areas in order to help mitigate Melbourne's expansion, along with better integration of our transport offerings. It is important to stress that prime agricultural areas warrant greater respect, with the conservation values of both agricultural land and natural land systems needing equal attention to ensure that we can continue to access and benefit from the valuable resources they contain.

The committee's study tour to British Columbia and Canada we received a lot of evidence which is embodied in chapter 3, under the heading 'Housing affordability and the cost of living'. It explains one of the ways Vancouver and other cities in Canada have sought to alleviate cost pressures for people wanting to get into home ownership.

I draw the attention of the house to some information the committee received from Mr Adrien Byrne, communications manager of the Urban Development Institute of British Columbia, and Mr Bob Ransford, an urban designer and member of that organisation. They spoke to us at length — and we have reported on this — about the concept of secondary and tertiary suites. What are secondary and tertiary suites, members might ask? They are a means of providing lettable tenancy space within a building envelope. It might be in the form of a studio apartment built on top of a garage or an addition under the roofline or a basement, as in the Canadian experience. These principles took off in Canada because many Canadian homes actually have substratum space in the form of a basement where people can access the services that keep the building warm and dry during their long, harsh winters, so people have been subletting basements.

In 2002 the government of British Columbia recognised that about 30 per cent of dwellings were being sublet. There was no real regulation of that; it was illegal. It turns out that approach — allowing people to sublet part of their property, thus turning the average homeowner into a landlord — can be called 'providing mortgage relief'.

Country Fire Authority: report 2011–12

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I rise to make some comments on the Country Fire Authority (CFA) annual report 2011–12. Firstly, I commend the CFA's chairman, Kerry Murphy, staff and volunteers for their commitment to delivering the programs and policies and working together with the community to

keep all Victorians safe from fire and other emergencies.

The CFA has a long and proud history of serving the community. Just recently in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region there was a large, out-of-control bushfire near Violet Town. The response of the CFA and other emergency services was second to none, and I thank them for their efforts in protecting the community. Sadly we also experienced the death of two Department of Sustainability and Environment firefighters recently, which highlights the dangerous nature of the work involved in firefighting. Across the state the CFA responds to not only fires but also floods, motor vehicle accidents, hazardous material incidents and a host of other situations.

The report highlights a number of the CFA's significant achievements. The Creating our Future Together initiative is looking at the role of communications, upgrading facilities across the state, training, infrastructure and delivering on the significant recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. Another highlight is the use of social media, especially in emergencies, with the One Source, One Message warning system being integrated with social media. The implementation of the CFA FireReady application for smartphones was very successful.

The CFA is also always looking at recognising and recruiting new volunteers. The CFA's Radio Communications — Blackspot project was also highlighted in the report. It continues to do well, with the CFA funding solutions to 13 black spots in the 2011–12 financial year. The CFA also continued to pilot new initiatives to distribute information. One of the biggest achievements highlighted is the CFA's ability to work closely with the DSE and Victoria Police.

The report shows that in 2011–12 the CFA responded to a total of 38 831 incidents, which gives members some idea of the amount of work it undertakes. Of the total volunteers, 44 287 are male and 10 953 are female. The organisation relies heavily on its volunteers, all of whom provide a wonderful service to the state.

However, the brigade is increasingly facing challenges. It is called out to all sorts of hazards for an all-hazard response. Some findings of a recent report undertaken by the University of Newcastle into firefighting services in Victoria, *Occupational Health Effects for Firefighters — The Extent and Implications of Physical and Psychological Injuries*, are alarming and a cause of

great concern. The report found that the pressure of budget cuts to fire services, inadequate staff and a lack of communication is increasing the stress levels of Victorian firefighters. As well as fire incidents, firefighters are first responders to many incidents involving life-threatening traumas such as infantile death, suicide, medical emergencies, vehicle accidents, cases of extreme violence and of course natural disasters.

The report reveals a culture of neglect by government in addressing the welfare of our firefighters. It states that support mechanisms are superficial and have not kept pace with the changing role firefighters have to play. Research has found that 68 per cent of firefighters had scores indicating moderate levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms. The report also details that the hidden costs are that our firefighters are self-medicating and going untreated, as they do not have access to adequate support to address the root causes of the stress they are experiencing. The \$66 million in cuts the Liberal-Nationals coalition has made have contributed to this workplace stress, and put firefighters under enormous pressure. The University of Newcastle report into firefighting services in Victoria is a telling report which deals with the challenges faced by firefighters. I encourage members to take a look at the report, because these challenges are impacting greatly on our firefighters. I commend the CFA on its annual report.

Auditor-General: Addressing Homelessness — Partnerships and Plans

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — Today I speak on *Addressing Homelessness — Partnership and Plans*, which is a Victorian Auditor-General's report of February 2013. This is in so many ways a good news story, in particular for the coalition government and indeed for the Minister for Housing, Wendy Lovell. It is also a particularly good news story for those vulnerable Victorians who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. I would like to read from the audit summary at the very beginning of the report, which states:

The audit examined whether Victoria's implementation of NPAH —

the agreement on homelessness —

and VHAP —

the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–2015 —

is effective in addressing homelessness. VAGO assessed whether:

Victorian initiatives within the NPAH-Victorian implementation plan ... prevent or reduce homelessness

sound governance supports Victoria's implementation of NPAH

departments included in NPAH-VIP comply with NPAH requirements

VHA is on track to achieve its objectives.

I am sorry; there are a lot of letters there, but it is important to understand that we are dealing with two reports — that is, something that was established under the former government and something that has been initiated by this government. The report is very complimentary of this government, although in relation to the former government it states:

NPAH-VIP has not been supported by good governance arrangements. No single department is accountable for performance against NPAH-VIP or the state's compliance with NPAH.

But it does say:

DHS has demonstrated comprehensive planning and a considered approach to improving homelessness service delivery in VHAP. It has established mechanisms to support the achievement of VHAP including interdepartmental collaboration and oversight, and an evaluation framework built into the plan's design. If implemented according to plan, VHAP should deliver the reforms needed to drive homelessness system improvement.

That is an enormous endorsement, and I congratulate the minister and the coalition government on such a fine result.

Speaking on this report tonight gives me an opportunity to talk about some of the areas I represent in the Southern Metropolitan Region and to speak of some of the excellent work that is done in my electorate on homelessness. The Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda is an extraordinary organisation. I have been there to help serve lunches. They serve 450 lunches every day and feed a whole range of people, some of whom are homeless and some of whom live in rooming houses. It is a very extensive service that not only feeds a whole heap of people but also provides a number of other services as well.

Another service in my electorate that is excellent is Wintringham Services, which is just near my office in Port Melbourne. It was established by Bryan Lipmann to give a residence to people who have been homeless all their lives — that is, the elderly homeless. These are the people we overlook. The cohort of homeless people is not as it used to be; it now includes families, mothers and children, young men, old men, people with a mental impairment and people with drug and alcohol

issues. But Wintringham also recognised that there was a whole cohort — the elderly homeless — who had not had a home for a significant number of years, and Bryan Lipmann was convinced they needed to be given a home in the last years of their lives. Together with Ms Crozier, who is in the chamber, I have visited the facility, which is excellent.

Wintringham's mission is to provide dignified, affordable, high-quality housing to elderly men and women who are financially disadvantaged, homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and to be an advocate for elderly homeless men and women, or those at risk of becoming homeless. It certainly achieves those goals.

The homelessness action plan is excellent. I have also seen it in operation in Noble Park, and together with a disability facility it has done some excellent work there. Wintringham Services is an excellent organisation.

Office of Police Integrity: *Crossing the Line*

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — Like Mr Viney I rise to make a statement on the *Crossing the Line* report. I do so on the day that the government crossed the line from somewhat worrisome to utter farce. That is not just as a result of the two or three days of leaked tape recordings, but, of course, the resignation of the member for Frankston in the other place as well, which has now denied the government its majority.

It is timely to go back and revisit some of the commentary in the *Crossing the Line* report, the context of the matters that have been outlined in the *Herald Sun* over recent days and particularly some of the comments made by the Deputy Premier, Mr Ryan. At page 76 of the report, in a response to the draft report Mr Ryan says:

I did not discuss Mr Weston's activities with him or anyone else before or after they were undertaken. To the best of my knowledge and belief, Mr Weston did not discuss them with anyone else from my office.

Mr Weston acted beyond his authority in relation to the issues set out in the draft report.

That is what the Deputy Premier says at page 76. At page 52, a range of contentions are made by the Deputy Premier including that he was dumbfounded by the actions of Mr Weston. He describes Mr Weston's comments as being 'fanciful nonsense' and 'fiction' and that his actions were 'utterly and completely outside the province of his responsibilities' and so on. At page 35 of the report he also claims to be unaware of the fact that the Minister for Corrections, Mr McIntosh, spoke with Sir Ken Jones even though Mr McIntosh

had asked the Deputy Premier whether he thought there might be a role for Sir Ken Jones in the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

Continuously through the report the Deputy Premier denies any knowledge of the conduct of Mr Weston, denies any knowledge of any relationship between Mr Weston and his office, and denies any knowledge of Mr Weston speaking to the Minister for Corrections — and that, of course, is supplemented by the fact that the Premier has no knowledge of the actions of not one of his chiefs of staff but two chiefs of staff. He had no idea what Mr Kapel was up to and, it appears, he had no idea what Mr Nutt was up to in his conversations and the job offerings and the like that went on with Mr Weston.

Clearly at very best we have a government where the two most senior ministers, the Deputy Premier and the Premier, are completely unaware of what is going on in their offices. Mr Ryan's denials are worth comparing to Mr Weston's comments on the tapes of his conversations with Mr Nutt. Mr Weston says, for example, in a conversation with Mr Nutt that Mr Hindmarsh had come in and said:

'Peter wants you to go and find out when and where they took place'. And I said, 'I'm going to use up a lot of political capital and call in a lot of favours to do that because they won't want to divulge their sources'. Peter came in and said to me: 'Go and do it and go and do it straight away'.

Mr Weston says after he had done it the Deputy Premier said to him:

This is fantastic work. This is exactly what I want you to do. I want you to keep this up.

Because it was forewarning him of problems that were coming, rather than being ambushed at 4 o'clock on a Thursday. He also says that he produced a briefing paper for Peter and he discussed it with him at length — —

Mr Drum — On a point of order, Acting President, I ask Mr Pakula what report or what script he has been referring to in the last 30 seconds, because he was referring to the *Crossing the Line* report but I think he has now switched and is referring to something different. It is totally misleading.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — On the point of order, Acting President, I can help Mr Drum. If he had been listening he would know that I said it was worth comparing the *Crossing the Line* report to the transcripts in the *Herald Sun* because they both refer to the same matter. In response to Mr Drum's point of order — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! Mr Pakula to continue.

Mr Drum — On a further point of order, Mr Acting President, Mr Pakula is now quoting the Deputy Premier. He is quoting the Deputy Premier in mid sentence, and he has not given any reference as to what aspect or issue he and Mr Weston are supposedly talking about. Mr Pakula is just quoting out of thin air, and he is somehow or other trying to link this back to the Deputy Premier's knowledge of untoward behaviour. It is totally misleading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Thank you, Mr Drum, I have your point. I ask Mr Pakula to continue, but I ask him to make sure there is a direct correlation between what he is talking about and the report he is speaking to.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — Thank you, Acting President. Of course I will do so. As the house knows, there is a direct correlation, because the matters I refer to and the matters that Mr Weston refers to in his interview with Mr Nutt, the recordings of which have been released, are about one and the same thing — that is, what did Mr Ryan know and when did he know it? I cannot be any more blunt. I will not quote Mr Ryan, but I will quote Mr Weston again: 'I can't put any sugar on it'.

Mr Drum — On a point of order, Acting President, I have asked Mr Pakula to explain what the previous conversation was actually about because he has drawn a correlation that does not exist.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! I have heard Mr Drum's point. Mr Pakula to continue on the report.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — This is quite pathetic interference from Mr Drum because he and I both know that what is in *Crossing the Line* and what is in these transcripts relate to one and the same thing. In the *Herald Sun* transcripts and in his conversation with Tony Nutt, Mr Weston gives the lie to the denials in *Crossing the Line*. He says that Mr Ryan was not truthful: that he was not truthful to the Office of Police Integrity, that he was not truthful to the Parliament and that he is continuing to not be truthful about what he did.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Auditor-General: *Implementation of School Infrastructure Programs*

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise and speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's report entitled *Implementation of School Infrastructure Programs* dated February 2013. I think all members in the chamber would agree that education is an extremely important aspect of government administration, and we invest a huge amount in our education services and our children. My speech is concerned with infrastructure programs. In previous contributions in this place I have spoken about projects and programs that were undertaken by the Labor government. This report also highlights some significant failings by the Labor government in relation to maintenance backlogs. We know that the federal government takes great delight in its Building the Education Revolution (BER) program —

Mrs Petrovich — They are big on revolutions.

Ms CROZIER — They are.

The federal government takes great delight in that program, but it was almost a one-size-fits-all approach, and questionable undertakings went on in relation to a number of those BER programs. There are a number of schools in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region, as is the case with most members in this place, and those schools of course vary. Various BER programs have been undertaken, and I have questioned some of them. In many instances they seem to be extremely unnecessary or not exactly what school communities wanted or expected. In other schools there are a number of good facilities, such as science and mathematics facilities. Nevertheless, we know that there has been a blow-out in those BER programs and that that has had a significant impact.

When the coalition came to government it gave an undertaking that it would perform a maintenance audit; that was a pre-election promise. The audit showed there were 27 000 school buildings, and the government assessed 1539 government schools. These are large numbers. The total value of school building assets is \$10.7 billion, so this is a significant portfolio area and it requires significant input to maintain these services.

Caulfield Primary School, just down the road from my office, severely lacks maintenance in one particular area. It has a very flash hall sitting on the pavement, which was constructed through BER, yet it has ceilings falling in and insufficient staff rooms. The school's building funds could have been better utilised if the federal government had addressed the concerns of the

local community and the school. Nevertheless, I am pleased the coalition government undertook that audit and has a baseline from which to work. Despite the billions of dollars that were spent on programs such as BER, the audit revealed a massive \$420 million in maintenance backlog. The government is addressing this backlog and ensuring that we address some of the concerns of local school communities which I have highlighted.

I am pleased the Victorian government has looked at this closely and will spend \$51.5 million at more than 200 schools on urgent maintenance following a decade of the former Labor government's neglect in this area. It knows how to spend and throw money away, yet it does not consider its local communities or what they want. This report highlighted those aspects, and I commend the Auditor-General for his report.

Victorian Skills Commission: report 2011–12

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — At a time of increasing educational crisis in our once great state, with education suffocating under the Baillieu-Ryan government, I rise to address the house on the Victorian Skills Commission's 2011–12 report. I note there may be only one more annual report, because the government in its damaged wisdom has abolished the commission. As we all know, the Victorian Skills Commission has been dealt a fatal blow due to the mismanagement and budgetary strangulation of this administration. I hate to say this because I respect both Mr Dixon, the Minister for Education, and Mr Hall, the Minister for Higher Education and Skills. However, I believe the problems that will be with our state for years to come are due to uninformed interference by the Premier and the Treasurer, neither of whom have any real or practical understanding of training and education, of skills or apprenticeships.

Education across the board is taking a battering, and while there were positive figures in this skills commission report of 2011–12 those numbers are now falling. I deeply fear what will be left behind: a generation without proper training; a workforce with far fewer skills; and labourers manipulated by greedy employers keen to exploit the lack of skills of their employees by forcing them to work longer hours for less pay under poorer and even less safe conditions. That will be the legacy of the Baillieu-Ryan government.

According to pages 1 and 2 of the report, in 2011 18 TAFE institutes delivered an amazing 200 million contact hours through 651 000 enrolments. In June last year we had 144 000 apprentices in Victoria. I hate to

ponder how far these figures have fallen since then under the Baillieu-Ryan administration. As has been raised many times in this house but in different terms, the budgets for education, training and skills have been shredded like the actions of the grim reaper — this government has let loose without control and without limitation. We have lost the Victorian Skills Commission and 16 state training advisory boards. Indeed the powers of the Victorian Skills Commission were transferred to the appointed Secretary of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

I realise that I sound very negative, but as I read through this report and thought about how everything good in it has since been butchered, my hopes for the future of our state under this leadership dropped for manufacturing, industry, trades and skills retention. Labor left a very solid legacy when it left office. That is visible in this report and it was visible in the preceding years, but the facts today are otherwise and this government must be held responsible.

A group of TAFE teachers came to my office late last year led by a teacher who told me bluntly how strange he felt entering my office because he had never voted anything but Liberal, but he then saw that the future of the whole state was at risk and that what he had supported in the past was past.

All members should read this report as it outlines a great deal about how well we were doing in the skills area and the potential we had for greater successes, which has all now been lost. Why has this government betrayed trainers, teachers, tradies and apprentices? I commend the report to the house, but I cannot commend what the government has done to the Victorian Skills Commission.

Auditor-General: Implementation of School Infrastructure Programs

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — I rise this afternoon to speak on the Auditor-General's report, *Implementation of School Infrastructure Programs*. It was very interesting to listen to Mr Elasmars' take on this particular report and Mr Eideh's take on the Victorian Skills Commission report, because they would have you think that the day after the last election all the schools in Victoria suddenly fell apart. It seems that they believe that in each of the buildings mentioned in this report, after everyone had cast their ballot and there was a new government in town, the wood started to rot around window frames, the floorboards started to come up and the electrical systems in some schools started to fail. The fact is that these problems are due to

long-term underinvestment. On page viii of the Auditor-General's report the audit summary states:

Residual issues with the condition of buildings are influenced by a long legacy of government underinvestment in the maintenance of school buildings.

These problems did not arise in an instantaneous or a spontaneous way but were the result of a long legacy. To combat this the Victorian government will spend \$51.5 million on more than 200 schools that require urgent maintenance. This is the beginning of what has needed to be done for so many years. It is the beginning of fixing our schools and putting them where they need to be.

On page 8 of the report the Auditor-General stated:

However, despite the \$4.5 billion invested in school buildings over the past five years, a further \$420 million in capital investment is needed to bring all school buildings up to the standard the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) requires.

VSP and BER investments have also contributed to a rapid rise in excess school space which will now require additional maintenance funding to remain in good condition.

That indicates that while the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program did all right and provided some very good facilities, the fact remains that in many cases there was no need for these facilities to be built in the way that they were, and the funding could have been better spent by the schools themselves making decisions about refurbishment or even rebuilding certain parts of their schools. Certainly we have seen a better use of BER funding by the non-government sector.

Later on in the report the Auditor-General mentioned that there were issues with the BER. There were some problems because builders were putting in huge quotes. On page 28 the report states:

While the main intent of BER was for building industry economic stimulus, DEECD argues that in the Victorian context, the building industry situation was more robust and therefore tender responses were often higher in cost. In some instances, DEECD chose to re-tender projects in order to pursue better value for money, which caused considerable delays.

We had builders thinking, 'We might be able to get a bit of coin out of this', and they put their tenders in, which then delayed the project even further. Another problem is that while a school may have received a good hall, science centre or library, it may not have received the footpath surrounding that new building or the new building may not have connected to anything. I have visited schools that do not even have asphalt going

up to new toilet blocks that were built under the BER program.

There have been other big stuff-ups by the previous government. There is the Galvin Park Secondary College — that school definitely did not fall apart as a result of the two years of administration of this government. It happened as a result of a long period of neglect. There is also the Rosamond Special School, which was left to rot for many years. It has taken this government to do something about those two schools. I commend the report to the house.

Office of Police Integrity: *Crossing the Line*

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I would like to make a statement on the Office of Police Integrity report, *Crossing the Line*, which is a report on the investigation into the conduct of a member of Victoria Police undertaking secondary employment as a ministerial adviser and his relationship with the Deputy Commissioner of Victoria Police. Obviously the report goes a lot further than that. I have made a statement on this report a number of times before, and I believe the statements I have made and the assumptions I may have made in those statements are increasingly being proven correct.

The coalition came to government with the view that the then Chief Commissioner of Police, Mr Overland, was not its cup of tea and not its person. It was the coalition's belief that Mr Overland should move on. That is what happens with governments. Perhaps that was not the worst thing the government could have contemplated, but the way it actually went about dealing with that was the real issue.

Mr Tristan Weston is mentioned many times in this report in relation to his activities when he was the advisor to the Deputy Premier, Mr Ryan. Mr Weston had no qualms about the fact that he did not enjoy Mr Overland being Chief Commissioner of Police. He had a preference for at least one other person, and he went about making sure that Mr Overland would not be the Chief Commissioner of Police in the short term.

Mr Tilley, the member for Benambra in the Assembly, who was the Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Emergency Services at the time, was pretty open in indicating that he did not think that Mr Overland was the best person for the job and that he would have liked to have seen someone else in that position. He was pretty open, as were a number of other members of the government, about that position. This report caused Mr Weston to be removed from his position as an

advisor and Mr Tilley to be removed from his position as a parliamentary secretary to this Parliament.

I have said a number of times that I cannot understand how this report resulted in Bill Tilley losing his position. Mr Tilley followed his government's line and did what was expected of him. He was very honest about who he spoke to, what was discussed and what his goals were. He did what the government he was serving expected of him, and it is absolutely amazing that Mr Tilley was removed from his position. In recent days Mr Tilley has said that he would enjoy coming back to some sort of position in the government but that he could not work with the Deputy Premier, Mr Ryan. He said that it was completely out of the question to work with the Deputy Premier after what has transpired. One thing that you have to say about Bill Tilley is that he calls it as he sees it. Good on him!

We have an interesting position where a member of the government who is held in esteem by a number of other members of the government is saying that he will not work with the Deputy Premier. That is an amazing position. It has been exposed in recent days that the Premier's chief of staff did not defend Mr Ryan when he was accused by Mr Weston of lying to the Parliament and to his own caucus, and Mr Nutt did not even challenge him. It is an amazing series of events. Now the Premier has come out and sent a letter to the new Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) fully knowing that he set up IBAC so it cannot investigate it.

If the Premier thinks this letter is going to make it all magically go away, he is absolutely dreaming, and recent events have shown that. We will soon discover why Mr Shaw, the member for Frankston in the Assembly, has quit the Liberal Party. We are all looking forward to that. I wonder if it is linked with this, because he is in a party where honest people like Mr Tilley get speared and less than honest people in the coalition get rewarded and become Deputy Premier of Victoria.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Beaumaris: secondary college

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — The matter I raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Education. On 27 February a meeting attended by over 500 people was held at the Beaumaris campus of

Sandringham College. The meeting was addressed by four departmental officials and consultants who plan to complete a new review of evidence regarding a stand-alone Beaumaris secondary college.

As I have raised in the house previously, this is a process that drags on endlessly and seems to sum up the Baillieu government's approach — make a \$6 million election commitment to the school, then procrastinate for two years and conduct another feasibility study. The school community has been actively engaged in over 12 months of meetings, surveys, consultations and feedbacks. The community has been clear in its desire for the Beaumaris campus to once again be a stand-alone school, and the Sandringham College school council has given its support for Beaumaris secondary college to stand alone. There was a promise of \$6 million, but so far not a cent has arrived and there is still no decision or support from the minister.

The school buildings are in dire need of refurbishing and rebuilding and the school community desperately needs a decision; many parents have made the hard decision to send their children elsewhere because of the terrible uncertainty about the future and direction of the school. There were only 17 enrolments in year 7 this year — all boys.

But this is the thing: while Nero fiddles, Rome burns. At the meeting the community begged the Liberal member for Sandringham in the other place, Murray Thompson, for his support, but he did not provide it. He could not bring himself to address the crowd until he was forced to by questions from the floor, and even then he would not commit to supporting a school at Beaumaris. On his own website he states, 'Academic research indicates a strong correlation between the built environment and student learning outcomes', and 'more money needs to be invested in state education to provide an appropriate learning environment for all Victorian students'. This is his and the Baillieu government's chance to put their money where their mouth is.

At the meeting the department told the community that demographic data did not provide enough evidence for a secondary college in this area. It is now way past the time for the government to honour its election commitment. The action I seek is that the minister commit to stand behind the community of Sandringham College and give it an assurance that the Baillieu government is committed to building a stand-alone school at Beaumaris which can become a centre of the community and a hub of educational excellence for their children. What the community desires more than anything else is that the government stop

procrastinating and do something other than to consult until it wears the last parent into the ground.

Canning–Princes streets, Carlton: safety

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Ryan, and it relates to the enforcement of traffic rules on the Canning Street bike path in Carlton, which is Melbourne's busiest bike path, particularly where it crosses Princes Street. VicRoads' statistics indicate that nearly 2400 bicycles a day used the intersection last year, which is up from about 1600 bicycles a day in 2006. The problem we have at that intersection is that cars are continuously entering and blocking the intersection in a way that is against the Victorian road rules. In fact it is an offence under section 128 of the Road Safety Road Rules 2009, which states:

... A driver must not enter an intersection if the driver cannot drive through the intersection because the intersection, or a road beyond the intersection, is blocked. Penalty: 3 penalty units.

I have been to this intersection and checked it out for myself, and that offence is occurring at nearly every change of the lights. It is quite a wide intersection, with a pedestrian section separated from a northbound bike crossing, then a southbound bike crossing and another pedestrian intersection. Cyclists have been campaigning for a long time to improve the way this crossing works. As I said, it is on one of our busiest roads.

While the offences are occurring at nearly every change of the lights, the actual blocking of the intersection in a way that interferes with pedestrians and cyclists is happening quite often. I observed a blockage happening three or four times in the 30 minutes I was there on Tuesday. What is needed is a combination of targeted enforcement and awareness raising. It could be that some extra on-road treatments — signs and the rest of it — would help, which would be a matter for the Minister for Roads, but in this case I am seeking the intervention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to raise awareness amongst drivers.

It rarely happens that drivers block other drivers, but because this crossing is mainly a bicycle and pedestrian intersection in one direction and is used by cars in the other, drivers do not seem to understand that they have to keep that intersection clear, just as they would any other intersection in Melbourne. We need some work by Victoria Police in order to raise awareness and reduce this problem, which is causing a safety hazard to cyclists and pedestrians.

National Youth Week

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Youth Affairs, the Honourable Ryan Smith, and relates to the upcoming celebration of National Youth Week between 5 and 14 April. In Bendigo alone \$6000 will be invested in youth-based projects at Bendigo TAFE, La Trobe University and Bendigo Lead On during National Youth Week.

This year National Youth Week will be coordinated by the Victorian coalition government and not-for-profit organisation beyondblue and will focus on the effects of mental illness upon young people within communities in Victoria. Increasing pressure to perform academically in sport and within the workplace creates unrealistic expectations in the minds of many young people, and often it is the stress of trying to fulfil these ideals that is at the heart of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression, which are an increasing problem within communities. Issues relating to body image and sexuality are also at the forefront of issues affecting youth mental health, as well as the everyday use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and WordPress, which give youth a space to express their opinions and ideas. The flipside of this is that these sites feed a need for social acceptance amongst youth, and that need can take many forms.

We are also noticing that such issues as sexting and cyberbullying are on the increase amongst young people in our communities. These social issues are a product of existing cultural values, but the difference is that they are now being performed in a new social space. The natural immediacy of social media is having real consequences for young people in our community and impacting on the way they perceive themselves and their peers.

The coalition government is committed to working with young people to find practical solutions to problems affecting them every day. Some \$540 000 in funding has been invested in the Change It Up program, which is now being rolled out across the state. The Victorian coalition government is committed to improving youth leadership through funding programs such as Change It Up across this state. The Change It Up program provides each area with \$15 000 in funding to support locally based youth leadership programs. This program exemplifies the sorts of projects happening across the state under this government which will bring young people to the forefront of the decision-making process and encourage more young people to continue to live

within their communities after they have completed secondary study.

I ask the minister to continue government support for young people living in Northern Victoria Region by funding programs such as Change It Up and National Youth Week encourage more young people to take an active role in the community.

Dairy industry: farmer health

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Mental Health, Mary Wooldridge. A meeting of hundreds of farmers in Tongala last month highlighted the significant challenges facing the dairy industry.

The Farmer Power dairy meeting was arranged to draw attention to the plight of dairy farmers across the state. Farmers are frustrated and angry at the state government, which they say has chipped away at their industry. While dairy regulation was at the heart of the debate, there was a wider level of frustration among farmers of all varieties at the perceived decline in their industry.

Nigel Hicks, the northern representative of Farmer Power, said that the meeting was a call to arms and a search for support. The dairy sector is the largest agricultural industry in Victoria and makes a vital contribution to the state's economy, with dairy exports valued at \$1.93 billion in 2011–12. Dairy farmers are doing it tough, and depression and mental health issues are becoming a massive problem, especially in communities that rely upon farming for their income. Mr Hicks said that the fallout to the industry was having a huge effect on farmers' emotional health and mental wellbeing. He said people did not want to go out as they were too cash strapped and were worried that they might run into someone they owed money to.

One of the Baillieu government's election pledges involved spending more than \$100 million on improving Victoria's mental health services, yet the government has such little regard for mental health issues that it closed the mental health helpline in March 2012, and according to the health department data one-third of the calls to that line were from rural and regional Victoria.

The coalition government also axed the funding for the National Centre for Farmer Health, a \$3.4 million facility established to address health and wellbeing issues of Victorian farmers, farm workers and agricultural employees and their families. The former Labor government was very interested in taking action

to improve the productivity, competitiveness and sustainability of Victorian farms, and we did that by ensuring that farmers and farming communities had the mental health services they need.

My specific request of the minister is that she ensure that farming health issues are addressed promptly by committing an increased allocation of funding in the 2013 budget for mental health services in northern Victoria so our farmers have the support they need to cope with the many unique mental health challenges they face.

Of course another contentious issue is the jobs cut the government implemented in the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). Staff at DPI work collaboratively with the dairy industry to supply support and help to the farmers, and these services have been cut in northern Victoria.

Rail: Warragul station

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport, Mr Mulder. The matter relates to the Warragul railway station project and the third crossing of the railway line associated with that project.

The upgrade of the Warragul railway station — including the station itself, the car park and the third crossing — are all projects that were committed to by then shadow minister, now minister, Mr Mulder, and the member for Narracan in the other place, Gary Blackwood, before the last election. I am pleased that through the budgetary process significant resources have been allocated to the project. In total the state has committed \$22.7 million to the project. Throughout that period VicRoads and the other relevant government agencies have worked closely with the Baw Baw Shire Council, the members of which I pay credit to for their involvement in this project and indeed their vision for the beautiful community of Warragul.

They have worked assiduously on developing the plans for this project, and I was pleased that the federal government recently announced a \$3.35 million contribution to the project in recognition of the economic value that will be unlocked through this infrastructure development and investment. With the funding that has been secured this project is very exciting for Warragul, very exciting for job creation and very exciting for the diversification of the economy of what is the hub of west Gippsland — that is, Warragul.

The action I seek from the minister is an update from him on progress in relation to tendering for the project and in relation to the commencement of works for what is a very exciting project for the broader west Gippsland community.

Manufacturing: Portland jobs

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My matter this evening is for the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, Mr Ryan. It relates to Portland and the concerns I have had for some period of time in relation to the local economy. As recently as last Wednesday the headline of the *Portland Observer* read 'Another business closes doors'. On this occasion it is a business that has serviced the local community for 60 years with respect to machinery and engineering supplies. The article goes on to talk about the difficulties Portland is facing, and it quotes Cr Geoff White of the Glenelg Shire Council saying that there was 'an alarming succession of business closures' in Portland.

In December I mentioned my concerns about Portland. It is a great town of approximately 12 000 people. Alcoa and Keppel Prince Engineering are the two biggest employers. Job cuts have occurred at both, and we continue to fight for good industry and employment policy for both. It is an ongoing job for politicians and industry. However, when I drove into town last week the alarm bells went off. I had seen the empty car yards some time ago, but the number of vacant shops and the closure of the local Mitre 10 sent shudders down my back. Before I went to any of my meetings I drove around town, thinking to myself, 'What the dickens is going on?'. This is a great town — great people; beautiful, pristine coastline; great fishing; and high rainfall. It is lush. It is 362 kilometres west of Melbourne and 97 kilometres from the South Australian border. Locals know it is a beautiful spot, and all the talk in town is about how over the last two years things have changed. Before government members start accusing me of talking down Portland, let me say that nothing could be further than the truth. I am definitely pro-Portland. That is why I am raising this issue today — because I care.

We all know that geographical distance in itself is a disadvantage, and it means that it takes longer to get access to services. Often you need a critical mass to secure investment or government funding. We know that regional Victoria needs extra help, but it has become clear that since this government dismantled Regional Development Victoria there is no government instrument that is rooting for country Victoria. Sometimes there needs to be an interventionist government policy to get things moving, to pull things

together and to make sure there is a fair slice of the pie for all communities. The action I seek is for the minister to publicly come clean and provide the community with a plan that takes Portland, its local community and its economy into the future, and I push that as a matter of urgency because we cannot stand any more closures or job cuts in Portland.

Prevent Alcohol and Risk Related Trauma in Youth program: funding

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter this evening for the Minister for Health. Last night in the adjournment debate I raised a matter relating to the Prevent Alcohol and Risk Related Trauma in Youth (PARTY) program, and I directed that matter to the Minister for Community Services. I understand that the matter should have been directed to the Minister for Health. I am not going to restate what the issue is about, because it is in yesterday's *Daily Hansard*, but I wish to draw the matter to the attention of the Minister for Health and ensure that by doing it in this way the department refers the matter to the relevant minister.

Royal Melbourne Show: poultry exhibition

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Mr Walsh. This year will mark 158 years of the Royal Melbourne Show, an iconic and truly Victorian event. 'The Royal', as exhibitors call it, is conducted annually to promote and celebrate Australian agriculture, as the website claims. One of the longest serving exhibitions at the glorious show is the 150-year-old poultry display, which offers showgoers an opportunity to see prize-winning purebred chooks. The Royal Melbourne Show chook pavilion exhibits 1600 birds over the 10 days of the show. There is a long heritage of prize-winning chook breeding in Victoria; in fact 46 clubs across the state make up Poultry Stud Breeders and Exhibitors Victoria. These clubs have created not only a solid future for purebred chooks in Victoria but also created a social atmosphere for many.

There was \$104 million invested into revamping the Royal Melbourne Show. Today 51 per cent of its shares belong to the state government. This year the CEO of the show has decided that 150 years of tradition will be broken and replaced with *MasterChef*. I am not against the *MasterChef* production, but I am against the removal of the poultry exhibition, how this change was conducted and what this will mean for not only the hundreds of breeders but also the future of the poultry industry. Exhibitors who have made their exhibition an annual delight for showgoers were not offered any

consultation from the show board. Their heritage was simply removed, with only one consolation offered: a show space in June. That show is only a two-day event, unlike the Royal.

This is a dying industry, and if these Victorian clubs are not able to display their chooks at the Royal Melbourne Show, the future for this area of recreation and preservation is dire. The Royal Melbourne Show is the largest opportunity for Poultry Stud Breeders and Exhibitors Victoria to gain new members and secure its future. This decision has not only cut short the future of purebred poultry but also, sadly, the activity and livelihood of hundreds of Victorians across the state from ages 6 to over 80, all because, I assume, the government thinks the *MasterChef* stall will attract more people than holding with 150 years of tradition and heritage — tradition and heritage that have brought people to the show since its humble beginnings.

Breeders and I want to know. I ask the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security: after the former Labor government spent millions of dollars fixing the pavilion — and I repeat that I hold no grudges against *MasterChef* — will this stall be a one-off at the Royal Melbourne Show, and if this move is permanent, will Poultry Stud Breeders and Exhibitors Victoria be offered another space of the same size to show off its 1600 purebred chooks at the Royal Melbourne Show, or will Minister Walsh make room for both pavilions?

Responses

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — Firstly, I advise that there are no written responses to any adjournment matters. Tonight there were eight matters raised, of which seven are new matters.

I will refer Mr Lenders's matter to the Minister for Education.

I will refer Mr Barber's matter to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

I will refer Mrs Petrovich's matter to the Minister for Youth Affairs.

I will refer Ms Darveniza's matter to the Minister for Mental Health.

I will refer Mr O'Donohue's matter to the Minister for Public Transport.

I will refer Ms Tierney's matter to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development.

ADJOURNMENT

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I will refer Mr Eideh's matter to the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security.

Ms Mikakos raised a matter last night which she has now redirected to the Minister for Health. I am sure that will be redirected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.47 p.m.

