

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Thursday, 19 March 2015

(Extract from book 4)

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Legislative Council committees

Procedure Committee — The President, Dr Carling-Jenkins, Mr Davis, Mr Jennings, Ms Pennicuik, Ms Pulford, Ms Tierney and Ms Wooldridge.

Joint committees

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Ms Symes. (*Assembly*): Mr Battin, Ms Halfpenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr Richardson and Ms Ward.

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

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION**

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Deputy President: Ms G. TIERNEY

Acting Presidents: Ms Dunn, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Finn, Mr Morris, Ms Patten, Mr Ramsay

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The Hon. G. JENNINGS

Deputy Leader of the Government:
The Hon. J. L. PULFORD

Leader of the Opposition:
The Hon. M. WOOLDRIDGE

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:
The Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS

Leader of The Nationals:
The Hon. D. K. DRUM

Leader of the Greens:
Mr G. BARBER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Barber, Mr Gregory John	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Morris, Mr Joshua	Western Victoria	LP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFP	Mulino, Mr Daniel	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Carling-Jenkins, Dr Rachel	Western Metropolitan	DLP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ¹	Eastern Victoria	Nats
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Dalla-Riva, Mr Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Patten, Ms Fiona	Northern Metropolitan	ASP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Pennicuik, Ms Susan Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	Greens
Drum, Mr Damian Kevin	Northern Victoria	Nats	Peulich, Mrs Inga	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Dunn, Ms Samantha	Eastern Metropolitan	Greens	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Eideh, Mr Khalil M.	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Purcell, Mr James	Western Victoria	V1LJ
Elasmarr, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Ramsay, Mr Simon	Western Victoria	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Fitzherbert, Ms Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred	Western Metropolitan	Greens	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph	Northern Victoria	ALP	Springle, Ms Nina	South Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Ms Jaelyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Young, Mr Daniel	Northern Victoria	SFP

¹ Resigned 25 February 2015

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP — Labor Party; ASP — Australian Sex Party;
DLP — Democratic Labour Party; Greens — Australian Greens;
LP — Liberal Party; Nats — The Nationals;
SFP — Shooters and Fishers Party; V1LJ — Vote 1 Local Jobs

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Thursday, 19 March 2015

The **PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson)** took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Questions on notice

The **PRESIDENT** — Order! There are two matters that I want to address this morning. The first one is that I have been approached by Mr O'Donohue seeking to have questions on notice 417, 418, 419, 420 and 421 reinstated. I have had a look at the questions and the answers, and it is my view that those questions ought not be reinstated. The minister's position in providing the data that he has is reasonable.

I note particularly the minister's comment in respect of the matters about which Mr O'Donohue sought information that the previous government itself did not provide such information. The level of detail required is unreasonable in the circumstances. What the minister has offered — in fact not just in this answer but on an ongoing basis — with monthly statistics is adequate to satisfy me at this stage. If Mr O'Donohue believes there is some particular reason why he would need to pursue a daily figure in respect of Corrections Victoria, he would need to somehow explain that to the minister and perhaps also satisfy me as to why a daily figure would be necessary. Those questions will not be reinstated.

Unparliamentary language

The **PRESIDENT** — Order! I will also address a matter that has been brought to me by Mr Dalidakis and that relates to an interchange in the house yesterday. Mr Dalidakis was concerned about a reflection on him, in that he believed he was potentially described as a bully. I heard some of the interchange from my office. Ms Dunn was in the chair at the time and took, in my view, appropriate action in the circumstances. Ms Dunn did not seek a withdrawal from Mrs Peulich in respect of what Mr Dalidakis found offensive or of concern in terms of being characterised perhaps as being a bully in this place. There is a distinction — although I accept it is a fairly fine distinction — between calling someone a bully and suggesting they use bullying tactics. To me by extension those are almost the same thing. I find that is a very fine line of distinction.

I am mindful, however, of the fact that in the chamber during the relevant period yesterday there was considerable haranguing of Mrs Peulich. It was not interjecting; it was haranguing. When members engage in a barrage of interjections or in haranguing, it makes it

very difficult for the Chair, it makes it very difficult for Hansard, it makes it difficult for other members who are interested in the substance of the debate and it can certainly be intimidatory for a speaker who may perhaps be less experienced and accomplished than Mrs Peulich. From that point of view members need to consider that they are going to draw a response that they may not like and that it may be very difficult for the Chair to deal with if they engage in haranguing to start with.

On this occasion and in this particular week I and a number of other members are wearing a badge from the Bully Zero Australia Foundation. The qualities the foundation is asking us to reflect on this week include honesty, integrity, respect, transparency, responsibility and an altruistic view of all matters. It is worthwhile us considering that, because there is no doubt that when we do not respect other people and other people's views, behaviour can start to move into the realm of, if not bullying, using intimidatory tactics. I do not think that is justified in this place. I say to Mrs Peulich and to Mr Dalidakis that it is unnecessary to say anything across the chamber. I suggest maybe they have a cup of tea outside to resolve the matters.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Auditor-General's Report on Emergency Service Response Times, March 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament —

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — No. 14.

Fisheries Act 1995 — No. 12.

Infringements Act 2006 — No. 13.

Surveying Act 2004 — No. 15.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Legislative Instrument and related documents under section 16B in respect of an order under Section 7 varying the Project Area and Extended Project Area, 20 January 2015 under the EastLink Project Act 2004.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until 2.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 14 April 2015.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Playgroup funding

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to inform the house of the government's new \$50 000 investment to provide seed funding for new community playgroups through Playgroup Victoria. National Playgroup Week, which runs from 23 to 30 March, presents a good opportunity for all of us to acknowledge the important role of playgroups in bringing communities together.

There are currently 3000 community playgroups operating across Victoria each week; that is 30 000 families and 40 000 children involved in community playgroups. For these families, playgroups not only provide a space where they can support and learn from each other but they also play an important role in their child's early learning and development — a particularly critical time between birth and kindergarten.

Playgroups recognise that parents are a child's first and most enduring educators. Community playgroups also form one of the great volunteering communities across Victoria as they are parent run and parent led. However, not all areas of Victoria have local playgroups. Community playgroups operate without many resources, especially when they are first being established, which limits quality play opportunities for children.

Our government's funding will allow Playgroup Victoria to administer the Great Start Community Playgroup Fund, a grants program to support the start-up of new playgroups. Through this fund new playgroups will be able to benefit from items such as toys and books to make the job of starting a playgroup easier and make the playgroup more likely to succeed. The Andrews Labor government recognises that lifelong learning starts from birth, and it is committed to making it easier for more Victorian children to participate in playgroups.

Greyhound racing

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I rise to inform the house of new actions the Andrews Labor government is taking in response to allegations of live baiting in greyhound racing. Animal welfare is important to this government, and we take these allegations extremely seriously. The government acted quickly following the airing on 16 February of the ABC's *Four Corners* program on this issue. I have instigated a broad investigation into animal welfare and

allegations of animal cruelty in the greyhound racing industry, and the investigation is being conducted by the chief veterinary officer of Victoria, Dr Charles Milne.

On 10 March Dr Milne presented an interim report which identified a number of significant gaps in the enforcement of codes and standards relating to animal welfare in the greyhound racing industry. I have requested that the chief vet continue his review, focusing on how to strengthen animal welfare standards, governance and compliance in the industry to ensure that the right measures are put in place to protect the welfare of greyhounds.

As the house is aware, my colleague Martin Pakula, the Minister for Racing, also requested that an independent investigation be undertaken by the racing integrity commissioner, Sal Perna. Mr Perna has provided an initial report of his investigation, including an interim recommendation to government, which is being actioned. The government has directed the Department of Justice and Regulation to examine legislative changes required to increase animal welfare compliance powers.

The Minister for Racing also announced a new board will lead Greyhound Racing Victoria, and its members include Ray Gunston, Ken Lay, and Judith Bornstein. There is a great need for this board to work to achieve much-needed cultural change and to consider recommendations in the final reports of Mr Perna and Dr Milne, which the government expects to receive by the end of April.

Mr Drum — On a point of order, President, I seek clarification as to whether Ms Pulford, as the Minister for Agriculture, is now available to answer questions about the live baiting scandal that has rocked the greyhound industry.

The PRESIDENT — Order! In the context of her jurisdiction as Minister for Agriculture, yes.

Mr Drum — On a further point of order, President, the minister has talked about the strong and quick action she has taken, about the board being sacked and about a whole range of other initiatives that she has taken credit for, and I want to know whether or not she is now available to be questioned about the live baiting scandal.

Ms PULFORD — On the point of order, President, the issue of live baiting in greyhound racing requires a response from two ministers who have responsibility for different parts of this issue. I am always happy to take questions from any member on the parts that I am

responsible for, which is the animal welfare component and the inquiry being undertaken by Dr Milne. There is another investigation which is occurring in parallel every step of the way, and I would encourage the member to ask his colleagues in the lower house to direct his questions to the Minister for Racing.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It occurs to me that in making ministers statements, ministers are providing information to the house. Whilst ministers can primarily discuss matters within their own portfolio on an issue — such as this issue — the Minister for Agriculture has also sought to provide the house with information about some of the things that have been done to address this problem in a whole-of-government sense. Judged in proportion, it might well be an appropriate response from a minister in a ministers statement. However, the minister has indicated that while she is not responsible for the greyhound board and that action, she has taken other actions in respect of this in her portfolio responsibility.

Ordered that statement be taken into consideration next day on motion of Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan).

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Freedom of information

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I draw to the attention of the house how those opposite were prepared to say one thing in opposition and do another in government. They made grand claims consistently over a period of time, including in their statement of 9 October, that they would open the doors to the public. In their first test on this they have done the exact opposite.

I have put in a freedom of information request to the Department of Health and Human Services in relation to the red book, the briefing that is provided to the incoming minister. I have received a flat refusal to be provided with even a portion of the document. This clearly flies in the face of the government's claims prior to the election. The Premier, Daniel Andrews, said one thing about openness and transparency when in opposition and is doing the opposite in government. At the first test he has absolutely failed.

Let me remind those opposite that on 6 April 2011 Ms Mikakos said:

I urge the government to fully release the blue books ...

It is important that the people of Victoria have an opportunity to scrutinise the costings around those commitments ...

It is her department, they are her red books and she should ensure that the information that has been provided to her is provided to us.

In a question without notice on 2 March 2011, then opposition leader Daniel Andrews asked:

... will the Premier now lift his own veil of secrecy and release all departmental blue books so that all Victorians can have confidence in the delivery of each of his commitments?

However, this government is not prepared to give the Victorian public confidence that the commitments it has made will be delivered. We will hold this government to account and seek this information to be released.

Port Fairy Folk Festival

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I am pleased today to acknowledge two special occurrences in my electorate. Firstly, I acknowledge the Port Fairy Folk Festival, which was held two weeks ago. The volunteer committee of this event deserves acknowledgement, particularly the president, Bruce Leishman, and the secretary, Gayle O'Keeffe. This is special event that is run entirely by volunteers. Something like 30 000 people attend the festival in what is a small town. There are 1500 volunteers who work on this event, which is very special to the town and provides about \$1 million to the community through charitable events.

Mick and Peter Daly

Mr PURCELL — I would also like to congratulate Koroit's Mick and Peter Daly on the success of their family-owned business. They have just been awarded the IGA 2015 Australia International Retailer of the Year award. The awards were held this week in Florida, USA. It is an incredible achievement for a small supermarket to be recognised at this global level.

Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — On Thursday, 26 February, several parliamentary colleagues and I were invited to attend a networking event organised by the Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce & Industry. The event took place at the International Chamber House in Exhibition Street. This hub facilitates trade and investment opportunities. Those in attendance included businesspeople and high achievers from all walks of life. It was a pleasurable and informative evening as well as an opportunity to discuss wideranging issues relevant to Australia and the Middle East.

Galada Community Centre

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, on Tuesday, 12 March, it was my pleasure to witness the opening ceremony of the new Galada Community Centre, located in the Whittlesea municipality. This brand-new multipurpose facility will offer residents practical programs aimed at reaching out to both the elderly and young families in the community. The ceremony was officiated and co-hosted by Ms Mikakos, Minister for Families and Children, together with the mayor of the City of Whittlesea, Ricky Kirkham, and the CEO, Mr David Turnbull. I thank Whittlesea City Council for a well-organised tour and afternoon ceremony, and as always I was happy to speak to Whittlesea residents, who were also in attendance.

International Women's Day

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — Like many members in the chamber who have acknowledged and supported International Women's Day, I attended a number of events to mark this occasion. One of the events I had great pleasure in being involved with was an International Women's Day breakfast that I hosted for a group of 200 schoolgirls here in Queen's Hall. The occasion was organised by the Alliance of Girls Schools Australasia. Those 200 girls were terrific. They asked some very pertinent questions of the guest speaker, Debra Knight, who is the managing director of Crivelli Fine Coffee. She retold some insightful experiences, including challenges she faced through her university life and into her career. I am sure many of the girls would have benefited from that.

Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Ms CROZIER — I also had the great privilege of attending the annual Victorian Honour Roll of Women event. Twenty-two outstanding Victorian women were inducted into the honour roll, having served our community in a variety of ways — in the health area, in medical research, by providing community leadership in various organisations and in the other areas they have been involved in. I would like to particularly mention the late Lorraine Elliott, who was inducted. Lorraine had served as a mentor and supporter to many women engaged in political life, and I would like to acknowledge her on this occasion.

Australian Game Exhibition

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — Last weekend I had the pleasure of attending the Australian Game Exhibition at Lardner Park near Warragul, which

was put on by the Australian Deer Association. The expo was to showcase legal hunting in the state, particularly the hunting of deer. As part of the expo there was quite a good exhibition of mounted deer trophies. The exhibition celebrated the outdoor hunting culture in this state and the economic benefits that it brings.

Hickory Building Systems

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to speak on last week's announcement by the Premier and the Minister for Employment of a \$3 million investment in the manufacturing operations of Hickory Building Systems in Brooklyn. This investment project facilitated by the government will double the size of manufacturing operations at Hickory's sync bathroom pods facility, boost annual production by more than 200 per cent and help improve production systems to win more contracts across Victoria and the rest of Australia.

The announcement for this expansion has come at a good time for skilled workers in and around the western suburbs, with more than 100 jobs being created. The Andrews Labor government understands the value of employment and is creating more jobs and growing Victoria's local manufacturing businesses. It is important that we learn from other businesses in the manufacturing industry that unfortunately had no choice but to close their doors or transfer jobs overseas, leaving their employees with nowhere to go. We need to secure these local jobs, because these jobs are what people living in the western suburbs need. The expansion provided through the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources investment support program is what Victoria needs to boost industry and competitiveness, and I am proud to support this investment.

Miners Rest Kindergarten

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — Last Thursday, together with the member for Ripon in the Assembly, Louise Staley, I had the pleasure of visiting the Miners Rest Kindergarten, which has been open since January. The Miners Rest Kindergarten was funded by the coalition government during my term as Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The coalition provided a grant of \$600 000 towards construction of the facility and a further \$100 000 for completion of the outdoor play space. The kindergarten is co-located with the Miners Rest Primary School, and provides a one-stop shop for families and better outcomes for students because it allows for a smoother transition from kindergarten to

primary education. Congratulations to the kinder committee and the principal of the Miners Rest Primary School, Dale Power, on a wonderful outcome. It was truly rewarding to see the happy children in the modern, spacious learning and play environment and to join with the community to celebrate the kindergarten being open.

Early childhood funding

Ms LOVELL — I also inform the Minister for Families and Children that I have done her job for her and spoken to the office of federal minister Scott Morrison, who I urged to prioritise finalising the national partnership on occasional care. As of yesterday Mr Morrison's office had not received any correspondence from the Victorian minister, despite her telling the Victorian Parliament on Tuesday that she had written to him. The federal minister's office received one letter in January on the national partnership on early childhood education. The minister would have been alerted in her red books that this needed to be done. She should have been acting on this matter earlier but has failed in her responsibility as Minister for Families and Children.

Willis Parton

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — I acknowledge the passing in February of Willis Moss Parton, a very distinguished citizen in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region and a good man who was known to me and others in this chamber for many years. Willis was a big man in every sense of the word: he was highly active for the Liberal Party in the federal electorate of Goldstein and was a formidable force in his role as chair of the Goldstein electorate conference for 14 years. He was the right-hand man of a former federal member for Goldstein, David Kemp, for a number of years, both before and after he was chair. He was also a great contributor to many community organisations across the electorate, in particular Brighton Secondary College and St Peters Church in Brighton Beach. He was very active in these roles up until December last year, when his health declined.

Perhaps more importantly, he was Val's husband for 64 years. Theirs was a very strong and equal partnership that gave a lot of joy to a lot of people, including their family. I acknowledge Val's loss and also extend my condolences to Val and Willis's sons, Graeme, David and Christopher, and their families. Willis's memorial service will be held next week. I am sure it will be a fitting occasion for all of us to reflect on all that he did for so many and to acknowledge the

sense of loss that so many people and organisations now feel.

Family violence

Mr DALIDAKIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise to acknowledge and thank my parliamentary colleagues from across the political spectrum who yesterday voted unanimously to elect me as the co-chair of the parliamentary friendship group for the prevention of family violence. I was elected alongside Mr Murray Thompson, the member for Sandringham in the other place. This is the first time such a group has been established in Victoria, and it is closely modelled on the work undertaken by Mr Tim Watts, the federal member for Gellibrand. One reason men have been elected to the group is that it is largely accepted that the majority of men are perpetrators, and as such we need to acknowledge the problem and we need to — —

Ms Lovell — That the majority of perpetrators are men.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I apologise. It is largely accepted that the majority of perpetrators are men. We need to acknowledge that fact, own that problem and start dealing with it as a community. I wish to thank Fiona Richardson, the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, and the shadow minister, Ms Georgie Crozier, for their support.

As of February, 15 people had died at the hands of a current or former partner this year. In 2013–14 there was an 8 per cent increase in Victoria Police family incident reports compared with the previous year, taking that number to 65 393. That represents an 83 per cent increase since 2009–10, sadly showing an upwards trend when it should be heading downwards. It is important to know that the objectives of the group are to assist in our own education on this scourge and to help in education across Parliament and in our communities.

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, President, for clarification, in his members statement Mr Dalidakis said that the majority of men are perpetrators. I would hate the Victorian public to think we believe the majority of men are perpetrators of family violence. I think the member meant to say that the majority of perpetrators are men.

The PRESIDENT — Order! We enter some very dangerous territory if we start to edit each other's contributions.

Mrs Peulich — On a further point of order, President — and this is topical in relation to your earlier

comments — it would be unfortunate if the member tried to infer that he had the broad support of all members of Parliament when it is only the support of those who were in attendance for the vote.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is a matter of debate. Apart from anything else, every meeting convened in the Parliament is of the same nature. If we start being this intrusive and pedantic in members statements then it is a very slippery slope. Mr Dalidakis's contribution was made in good faith. Whilst Ms Lovell is probably right in terms of her interpretation of what Mr Dalidakis was trying to convey to the house, it is not for us to be editing these contributions.

Whilst I did not attend that meeting yesterday, clearly Mr Dalidakis enjoyed the support of the members who were there. To the extent that friendship groups operate under the goodwill of the Parliament and with its best interests in mind, he does enjoy the support of the Parliament and members on a broad basis. I do not want debate on matters of this nature.

I thought I had closed the matter, but I will hear Mr Dalidakis.

Mr DALIDAKIS — On the point of order raised by Ms Lovell, President, I acknowledge that her comment was accurate. I corrected myself in the statement, and I appreciate her pointing that out in good faith.

National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I start by thanking you, President, for your comments about the Bully Zero Australia Foundation this morning. Tomorrow is the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence. As founding chairman of the Bully Zero Australia Foundation, I am proud of the work the foundation does in seeking to stop bullying, in supporting those who are bullied and their families and in running education programs through schools, workplaces and community groups. It is a great support for those who have been bullied, as well as for those who bully. I congratulate the board and the CEO of the Bully Zero Australia Foundation for the great work they are doing.

I was bullied as a secondary school kid. I was the only semi-dark-skinned kid in a very white, Anglo-Saxon classroom, and throughout my secondary school years rather than call me by my own name they called me 'Nigger Boy'. I was able to get away from it, because at 3.30 p.m. I went home. But these days children cannot

get away from bullying, with the introduction of iPads and social media. We have to protect our children. We have to protect those who are bullied. I call on all Australians today, tomorrow and beyond to work together to make Australia a safer nation for every generation.

Child protection

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — On Monday I was pleased to meet with the Protective Behaviours Victorian reference committee in Dandenong. The committee was established to bring together a broad range of expert agencies and individuals to educate, advocate and inform about the need for child abuse prevention and personal safety education for all children at the local and national levels. The committee is made up of representatives from Child Wise, the South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault, Wesley Mission Victoria, Save the Children, Survivors of Abuse and Protective Behaviours Australia. Jayneen Sanders, author of *Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept*, is also a member.

One in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 16, and girls between the ages of 10 and 14 are the greatest proportion of survivors of sexual abuse. With horrific statistics like this, it stands to reason that we should approach the issue of sexual abuse in the same way we do other critical social issues, such as family violence and health. Aiming prevention programs at maternal and child health services, early childhood education providers and schools should be a priority. I encourage the Minister for Education, James Merlino, to prioritise the inclusion of compulsory body safety education in the curriculum and programs.

SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (MOVE-ON LAWS) BILL 2015

Committee

Resumed from 17 March; further discussion of clause 1.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

Clause 4

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I move:

1. Clause 4, lines 5 and 6, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert —

'(1) In section 6(1)(g) of the Principal Act, for "1981; or" substitute "1981.".'

I want to keep the criteria in the principal act, being the criteria of being able to be moved on for having committed an offence in the last 12 hours, a reasonable apprehension of violence and reasonably being suspected of being a drug dealer or user. The reason for this is that this is just common sense and should be retained.

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — The government opposes Mr Bourman's amendments. With all due respect, we made an election commitment to repeal the coalition's changes to the move-on laws in full, and that is what we are going to do. That is what we are progressing with.

With regard to the 12-hour issue, in the debate we heard about some of the impact this can have on homeless people and a number of other people as an unintended consequence in terms of people being caught up with those powers, who could be treated pretty harshly under that provision. With regard to the issue of those people who police may suspect intend to procure drugs, it is a fairly tenuous link. There is no proof of any drug dealing required under the current legislation. A move-on direction could be given where a person has done no wrong merely because of a suspicion that a person may procure drugs sometime in the future.

It is the government's contention that the community needs to be protected from drug dealing and that it ought to address the problem and protect the community. However, there are more appropriate powers of arrest in other acts in terms of people dealing in drugs. If a person is found illegally procuring drugs, it is appropriate that they be arrested. In fact the police have powers to then go on and engage that person in drug diversion programs, which have proved extremely effective. We believe police already have the powers to arrest any person illegally supplying or in possession of drugs of dependence, which are offences under sections 71AC and 73 of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. For that reason and principally because of our election commitment to repeal those changes in full, we will not be supporting the amendment.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — The Greens will not be supporting these amendments, as I outlined in great detail, firstly, last year, with regard to the introduction of the legislation by the previous government, and secondly, on Tuesday, with regard to this bill, which repeals those provisions put into the legislation by the previous government. The particular provisions Mr Bourman's amendments would like to keep are certain criteria for moving on a person. The first one, which applies where there is suspicion that a

person may have committed an offence in the past 12 hours, is vague and does not specify the offence. It is not related to the need to move on the person.

The second provision about the apprehension of a person who may commit violence is already covered by the Summary Offences Act 1966 as it stands. It provides that a person can be moved on if there is a reasonable belief that that person may injure another person or damage property. That provision is already present in the Summary Offences Act. There are also other provisions under the Crimes Act 1958 and other acts that would deal with that situation. The minister has just pointed out that, with regard to procuring or using drugs, in terms of the other acts, if somebody is engaged in dealing drugs, they should be arrested. One would not want to see them moved on, one would want to see them arrested because they are committing an offence. The Greens have made the point many times that these provisions are already present in other acts. In the committee stage on Tuesday the minister went through quite a number of acts that covered a range of offences that were introduced into section 6(5) of the act by the previous bill. The Greens will not be supporting these amendments.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I thank Ms Pennicuk for her comments, but I need to point out that she is completely wrong in that the portion of the act I want to retain does not give police the ability to move on someone who is suspected of committing an offence in the last 12 hours but rather someone who has committed an offence in the last 12 hours.

Much is made of arrest powers in various acts, including the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, and I still find it curious that people want troublemakers arrested and not moved on. Other people may like handcuffs, but they are not my thing. I also point out that homelessness is not an offence. I hear the homeless example being brought up all the time. Someone does not get moved on for being homeless; they have to be moved on for one of a set of criteria.

Finally, suspicion is a reasonable ground, and it has been tested in court over — I do not know — the 150 years or so that this state has been a state. It is not just a case of the officer having a bad day; there has to be something that is testable and that will actually stand up in court.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The coalition will support Mr Bourman's proposed amendments. As Mr Bourman said in his introductory comments, they are common

sense. The provisions in the Summary Offences Act he is seeking to retain were inserted by the coalition last year with a view to protecting the Victorian public.

What we have heard from the government and from Ms Pennicuik on behalf of the Greens is their view that there are mechanisms elsewhere on statute that Victoria Police can use and that they do not want Victoria Police to have the capacity to easily and simply via the Summary Offences Act deal with these problems. This is because neither the government nor the Greens support Victoria Police. Neither the government nor the Greens support community safety. They would rather see people be able to cause trouble, intimidate people, be involved in procuring or dealing drugs and making a nuisance of themselves in this way instead of giving members of Victoria Police the capacity to exercise their judgement and move on people in a simple way.

We heard from Mr Bourman who, of course, as a former member of Victoria Police knows full well the way in which members of Victoria Police would be required to exercise their powers under the substantive provision in the act. He knows full well the way in which Victoria Police would exercise its judgement in using these provisions. The coalition, in inserting those provisions into the act last year, felt they were an appropriate mechanism and an appropriate additional complement of powers for Victoria Police and protective services officers to address these issues in the community as they arise. Mr Bourman's amendment seeks to retain some of these provisions, and that would result in a bill that is less worse than the bill being introduced by the government and that is currently before the house. The coalition will strongly support Mr Bourman's amendment and urges other members of the house to do likewise.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — It is incumbent on me to respond to the remarks of Mr Bourman and Mr Rich-Phillips. Mr Bourman is correct in saying that I was slightly incorrect in my interpretation, or in what I said. I actually understand that the provision deals with circumstances where the person has committed an offence, but my comments still remain: it is very vague and, as I mentioned in the second-reading debate, the term 'an offence' can range from the offence of failing to swipe your myki card to assault. Either of those can be called an offence. Just moving someone on because they committed an offence, which could be a minor offence that is unrelated to their presence at that particular place, is no justification for so doing.

I have raised many times in my contributions on these laws the question of how the particular police officer or

protective services officer (PSO) will know that information — that an offence has been committed in the previous 12 hours. The person could be alleged to have committed an offence, but they could be found at a later date or even at the time not to have done so.

In regard to the issue of procuring drugs, Mr Bourman asked why we would not want to move those people on. Move them where? Move them on to another place to continue the activity? It does beg that question, does it not? We would not be supportive of that particular course of action either.

If a person is committing an offence, there are plenty of provisions in the Summary Offences Act, the Crimes Act and other acts to deal with that person. The problem arises when you are leaving the provision very vague and allowing wide discretion for police and PSOs to act on suspicions that someone may commit an offence in the future. That is part of the danger of these provisions.

It is completely disingenuous for Mr Rich-Phillips to accuse the Greens, or the government for that matter, of not supporting the police. We have been shown many times to support the police and their activities; we have supported them in an industrial capacity as well. We have also been concerned with public safety. The issue is that we already have sufficient provisions, and in some cases more than sufficient provisions, under the current statutes to deal with all the issues that have been raised by Mr Bourman.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — In response to Ms Pennicuik's last comment with respect to Victoria Police, she said the Greens support Victoria Police, yet in her earlier response to Mr Bourman's remarks she cited the example of the existing capacity for police to move on people who have committed an offence in the last 12 hours and referred to minor offences such as failure to swipe their myki card. In raising such an example Ms Pennicuik is highlighting the contempt of the Greens for Victoria Police. She said through that comment that members of Victoria Police will not exercise any judgement in the use of this provision and that Victoria Police cannot be trusted with such a provision. That is not a position that the coalition supports, and I would expect it is not one that the vast majority of Victorians support.

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — I would also like to respond to Ms Pennicuik's comments and her example of failing to swipe a myki card — which would in fact be indicative that the person was trying to

use public transport to move from one place to another and moving on would in fact be their intention.

A lot of the arguments against these amendments seem to suggest there is distrust of the Victoria Police force. Personally I have a lot of faith in the Victoria Police force, and I know quite a few members. To this day I have not spoken to a single one who thinks it is a good idea to repeal these move-on provisions; they all feel this is a very useful tool.

I would suggest if the government has such a distrust of the police force, it should be looking for other ways of addressing it.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Again I would say to Mr Rich-Phillips that the job of the police is to enforce the law and it is the job of Parliament to ensure that the law is clear. The problem with that particular provision is that it is very vague and not clear. That is one reason, among others, why we did not support this provision in the first place. I say again that it is not needed because the police have other provisions, that are very clear, under which they can act.

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — The government appreciates the genuineness of Mr Bourman's comments on his position — I note there has been moving around on a whole heap of other issues over time — and his belief in the amendments.

The government does not see that moving on dealers does not just create a problem somewhere else — it sees there is an issue there. There is certainly no distrust of the police. We understand that police often have very difficult decisions to make when they are dealing with crowd control and a range of other activities. Of course it is their experience, their training, their knowledge of who is in the crowd et cetera and their observations that will determine how they move in terms of the law.

The police can always give an unofficial warning prior to arrest, which is sometimes useful. I would imagine Mr Bourman would be aware of that. Once again, at the end of the day the government's position is that it opposes the amendment because it had an election commitment and a clear, concise and straightforward mandate, if you like, to repeal in full the changes relating to the move-on laws which the coalition made when in government; and that is what it is doing in this legislation.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I am disappointed in the government's response and the fact that it is not even interested in any of the amendments.

It is safe to say that Victoria Police need a tool like this. It is part of proactive policing.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! There being no other speakers on the amendment, I remind members that Mr Bourman's amendment 1 is also a test for his amendments 2 to 4.

Committee divided on amendment:

Ayes, 16

Atkinson, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Bourman, Mr	Morris, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Crozier, Ms	O'Donohue, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Davis, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Drum, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Finn, Mr	Wooldridge, Ms
Fitzherbert, Ms	Young, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes, 20

Barber, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Carling-Jenkins, Dr	Mulino, Mr
Dalidakis, Mr	Patten, Ms
Dunn, Ms	Pennicuk, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Purcell, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Elasmar, Mr	Shing, Ms
Hartland, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Somyurek, Mr
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms
Leane, Mr	Symes, Ms
Melhem, Mr	Tierney, Ms

Pairs

Nationals vacancy	Pulford, Ms
Ondarchie, Mr	Jennings, Mr

Amendment negated.

Clause agreed to; clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I call on Mr Bourman to move his amendment 5, which seeks to omit clause 6, which he will seek to do by voting against it.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I invite members to vote against this clause. Clause 6 relates to the ability to ask for the name and address of the person being moved on. This is clearly a good idea for the police for many reasons, one being intelligence gathering and another that it is always good to know where the criminals who are being moved on, which is what my amendment is all about, are at any given point in time.

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — Just very briefly, we have had the debate on this main issue. I appreciate Mr Bourman's position, but as I say, the government had an election

commitment to repeal all the coalition changes to the principal act and so that is what it intends to do.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Again, the coalition will support Mr Bourman's amendment. This will make the bill less bad than it is now by preserving the capacity for Victorian police to ask for names and addresses, and it should be supported.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — The Greens will not support the amendment moved by Mr Bourman. Police and protective services officers can already rely on their general powers, including under section 456AA of the Crimes Act 1958, which provides that a police officer may request a person to state his or her name and address where they reasonably believe that the person has committed or is about to commit an offence or may be able to assist in the investigation of an indictable offence. It covers the rationale that Mr Bourman just put forward for his amendment; it is already covered in the Crimes Act.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I am disappointed that the government will not support my amendment, but I thank the opposition for its support and I would like to have it put to a vote as soon as it can be.

Committee divided on clause:

Ayes, 20

Barber, Mr	Mikakos, Mr
Carling-Jenkins, Dr	Mulino, Mr
Dalidakis, Mr	Patten, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Dunn, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Purcell, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Shing, Ms
Hartland, Ms	Somyurek, Mr
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms
Leane, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Symes, Ms
Melhem, Mr	Tierney, Ms

Noes, 16

Atkinson, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Bourman, Mr	Morris, Mr
Crozier, Ms	O'Donohue, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Davis, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Drum, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Finn, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Wooldridge, Ms
Fitzherbert, Ms	Young, Mr

Pairs

Jennings, Mr	Ondarchie, Mr
Pulford, Ms	Nationals vacancy

Clause agreed to.

Clause 7

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order!

Mr Bourman's amendment 6 seeks to omit clause 7. I note that his amendments 7 and 8 to clause 8 are consequential on this amendment.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I invite members to vote against clause 7. This clause relates to exclusion orders, which are a mechanism whereby police go to the Magistrates Court — this is not a decision made by police — and a magistrate decides whether an individual is not getting the idea about moving on and needs to be ordered to stay out of an area for a certain amount of time.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The coalition will support Mr Bourman's amendment. As Mr Bourman indicated, this preserves the existing provision with respect to exclusion orders. It is important to note, as Mr Bourman did, that these exclusion orders are made by the Magistrates Court. They are not something Victoria Police can give effect to unilaterally; they require an order from the Magistrates Court. We believe they are an appropriate mechanism and should be retained in this legislation.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — The Greens will not be supporting this amendment. As I outlined in my contribution to debate on the second reading of the bill, this is one of the most egregious parts of the legislation in that persons who have committed no crime whatsoever, except turning up at a particular place more than three times in six months or five times in a year, can be subject to exclusion orders. The Greens did not support the inclusion of division 1B in the Summary Offences Act, and we now support its removal from the act, as proposed by clause 7.

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — This provision comes down to issues about what are appropriate limitations on freedom of movement, right to peaceful assembly and right to freedom of association, and obviously there are views on that. The government's view is very simple. We have a mandate. We went to the election with a commitment, as I have said many times, to repeal the measures in full, so the government's position is that we will not be supporting the amendment.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I am disappointed that the government will not support my amendment. I also note that the Greens do not support the Magistrates Court or the police.

Committee divided on clause:

	<i>Ayes, 20</i>
Barber, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Carling-Jenkins, Dr	Mulino, Mr
Dalidakis, Mr	Patten, Ms
Dunn, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Pennicuik, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Purcell, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Shing, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Hartland, Ms	Somyurek, Mr
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms
Leane, Mr	Symes, Ms
Melhem, Mr	Tierney, Ms

Noes, 16

Atkinson, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Bourman, Mr	Morris, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Crozier, Ms	O'Donohue, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Davis, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Drum, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Finn, Mr	Wooldridge, Ms
Fitzherbert, Ms	Young, Mr

Pairs

Jennings, Mr	Nationals vacancy
Pulford, Ms	Ondarchie, Mr

Clause agreed to.

Clauses 8 and 9 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Report adopted.

Third reading

The PRESIDENT — Order! The question is:

That the bill be now read a third time and do pass.

House divided on question:

	<i>Ayes, 21</i>
Barber, Mr	Mulino, Mr
Carling-Jenkins, Dr	Patten, Ms
Dalidakis, Mr	Pennicuik, Ms
Dunn, Ms	Pulford, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Purcell, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Shing, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Hartland, Ms	Somyurek, Mr
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms
Leane, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Symes, Ms
Melhem, Mr	Tierney, Ms
Mikakos, Ms	

Noes, 17

Atkinson, Mr	Morris, Mr
Bourman, Mr	O'Donohue, Mr
Crozier, Ms	Ondarchie, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Davis, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Drum, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Finn, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Wooldridge, Ms

Fitzherbert, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Young, Mr
Lovell, Ms	

Pairs

Jennings, Mr	Nationals vacancy
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Question agreed to.

Read third time.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

The Acting Clerk — I have received the following letter from the Attorney-General:

I refer to the Legislative Council's resolution of 18 March 2015 that relates to the production of contract documents entered into by or on behalf of the state of Victoria with the East West Connect consortium.

On 12 February 2015, I informed you that the Council's deadline of 12 February 2015 did not allow sufficient time for the government to respond to the Council's resolution, and that the government will endeavour to respond as soon as possible ...

At this time the government is not in a position to comply with the terms of this request by the specified time. The government will endeavour to respond to the Council's request as soon as possible.

**INTERPRETATION OF LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL 2015**

Second reading

**Debate resumed from 26 February; motion of
Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State).**

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak briefly in the debate on the Interpretation of Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. The Parliament is now dealing with big issues. In the three substantive sitting weeks of this Parliament we have seen the government bring forward its legislative agenda. We have seen it bring forward the so-called Back to Work Bill 2014, which was more about responding to a pre-election press release than it was about delivering anything. As members of the house know, the Back to Work Bill was vacuous. It contained nothing other than a commitment to set up an as yet undefined Back to Work scheme. It was a bill which said it would set up a scheme, but none of that scheme was in the legislation.

We have seen the government introduce and pass its amendments to move-on provisions of the Summary Offences Act 1966. This, of course, is the first payment of no doubt many payments the government will make to its benefactors at the Construction, Forestry, Mining

and Energy Union and elsewhere in the trade union movement. In the course of the first sitting weeks of this Parliament we have seen the government deal with its priorities. It has introduced a bill to address a press release and it has introduced a bill which makes the first payment of a big debt to the trade union movement, being the bill the house has just dealt with.

We now see the government move on to its next priority. It is very telling for a new government that one of the first pieces of legislation this house is asked to deal with is an amendment to the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984, a bill which changes provisions with respect to the use of italicised text in bill titles and references instead of bold text. We are dealing with the big issues here. One of the first pieces of legislation the government brings forward is a bill to change the use of bold text to italic text in references to an act.

The government has brought forward on the notice paper two other statute amendment bills of a similar nature which fix grammatical errors and typos in bills. This bill has as its substantive content the insertion of a definition of ‘registered medical practitioner’ and the insertion of a definition of ‘police officer’ in the act, both of which have been appropriately picked up from other statutes and in this provision with respect to allowing acts to be cited using italics rather than bold text. It speaks volumes that so early into its term the government’s legislative program is reduced to bills which make minor inconsequential amendments to acts, fixing typos and changing the way in which acts are referred to.

Of course ensuring that the statute of the state of Victoria is accurate is important and having the Interpretation of Legislation Act is important, but the fact that this is a priority bill for this government and one of the first things it introduces alongside not one but two statute amendment bills to address typos highlights the fact that the government does not have a legislative agenda. It does not have an agenda for the people of Victoria and Victoria is the poorer for it.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to contribute to the debate on the Interpretation of Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. As was outlined in the second-reading speech, but unfortunately not by the previous speaker, it is a technical but very important bill.

Mr Rich-Phillips interjected.

Ms SYMES — Disrespecting parliamentary counsel is shameful.

The Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — or IOL act, as it is affectionately known — applies to almost all Victorian acts, and it deals with the commencement and repeal of acts; formal matters relating to acts; rules of construction of acts; definitions; matters dealing with the exercise of powers and duties; matters affecting the operation of statutory bodies; and special provisions dealing with subordinate legislation, including regulations, rules of court and other statutory rules.

The IOL act is really important. It is only about 100 pages long, and it is something that every reader of legislation should have some familiarity with. It provides for the interpretation of Victorian legislation and confers powers on the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel to authorise alterations to the text of acts and statutory rules to implement changes to drafting style. This in effect enables parliamentary counsel to do its important work. It is a guide for consistency of language and of style and for issues of legislative interpretation. What could be more important than legislative interpretation in enabling people to understand what we as lawmakers are intending to debate?

A highlight of the act includes section 37, which clarifies that in legislation:

- (c) words in the singular include the plural; and
- (d) words in the plural include the singular.

It is important to be very clear that this is the case. Another is the definition section relating to the word ‘document’; it outlines that a document includes, in addition to a document in writing, everything from maps, photographs, discs et cetera. It concludes with:

- (f) anything whatsoever on which is marked any words, figures, letters or symbols which are capable of carrying a definite meaning to persons conversant with them;

I think that is a pretty thorough definition.

I understand the amendments contained in this bill are at the request of the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. It is a pleasure that the Andrews government is complying with this request. I have immense admiration, unlike the former speaker, for the chief parliamentary counsel and her team; it is indeed a tremendous service that the drafters of our legislation provide to this state. It requires talent to turn what we as lawmakers intend to achieve into a form of words that delivers a law that is clear in meaning and legally certain, avoiding ambiguity and legal loopholes, to ensure that it achieves its purpose and that it is as easy to read and understand as is possible in all circumstances.

I have had experiences with the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel somewhat regularly over the past 10 years, and I have been extremely impressed by the quality of its advice; it has always been exceptional. I would like to pay tribute to those gifted drafters, both present and past, who have contributed to the rule of law.

The amendments in this bill make improvements to the IOL act. Importantly, parliamentary counsel identified that it is not without question that an immunity or an indemnity remains when that immunity or indemnity was conferred by an act that has subsequently been repealed, been amended, expired, lapsed or ceased to have effect. This bill proposes to ensure that it is beyond doubt that that immunity or indemnity or any legal proceeding or remedy in respect of any such immunity or indemnity is unaffected by any of those events.

The government has also acted on parliamentary counsel advice to clarify the issues around delegation powers and ensure that the interpretation of that power provides a constraint on the power to delegate the power of delegation and hence prevent subdelegation. I am advised that this has not ever happened, but as model legislators it is prudent to close this loophole. I also understand that we may be the first state to legislate through the interpretation of legislation instrument to prevent subdelegation, and I would encourage other states to check their instruments accordingly.

The bill also includes additional powers for the chief parliamentary counsel to authorise limited stylistic changes to legislation and statutory rules. It is very important, and as I said, it enables the counsel to do its work and in turn help us as lawmakers and members of the public.

The amendments made by the bill in relation to style, definitions and interpretation will simplify the drafting of legislation and subordinate instruments in Victoria and ensure consistency in the appearance of existing and new laws. I am a long-time reader of legislation. I am a supporter of plain, modern language; clear formatting; the riddance of unnecessary words; and, importantly, laws that can be easily applied and easily understood. The IOL act assists in this regard. This bill makes improvements to the act, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The Greens support the Interpretation of Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 to

include new definitions and interpretative provisions to improve the operation of that act.

The bill proposes to insert definitions of ‘police officer’ and ‘registered medical practitioner’ into the Interpretation of Legislation Act for use in all Victorian acts and subordinate instruments, thereby simplifying the drafting of other legislation so that these definitions need not be repeated.

The bill will also insert three new interpretative provisions into the act: firstly, clarifying the legal position of an act or provision related to indemnity or immunity where that act or provision ceases operation; secondly, where an act is ordered by chapters and parts and the parts have decimal numbers, those parts may be referred to by their decimal numbers in that act and in other acts; and thirdly, providing that the power to delegate an act or subordinate instrument does not include a power to delegate the power of delegation.

Further, the bill provides for the updating of acts and statutory rules to bring them into conformity with current drafting style. The bill will add several new stylistic changes to those that the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel may authorise under the act — for example, formatting of part, schedule and form headings in sentence case rather than all capitals.

Once again, I am pleased to say that the Greens support this bill.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak on the Interpretation of Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, and I note the contributions from previous speakers in the house. No doubt the Daniel Andrews Labor government will hold up the bill as a great, shining achievement of its first 100 days in office. This is one of those bills where they are going to say, ‘We changed the font, we changed the style, we have done some wonderful things’. It is typical of a government that does not know where it is going and does not have a plan for jobs, projects or Victorians. When organisations do not know what to do in their first 100 days, they paint the walls and change the logos. This bill is a great example of the Daniel Andrews Labor government having no plan for jobs, no plan for transport, no plan for families and no plans for children. What the government is doing with this so-called very important bit of legislation is changing the font and changing the style. What a great achievement! Victorians must be so proud of them.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the quality of the contributions made by Ms Symes and Ms Springle,

previous speakers in this debate. I am disappointed with the contributions made by Mr Ondarchie and his parliamentary colleague Mr Rich-Phillips, which in and of themselves appeared to pay lip-service to the importance of clear and accurate drafting in legislation, which mirrors the intent of the government in the passage of various instruments. It is important to get this right in order to maintain a statute book that has consistency and thoroughness and to achieve the ends designed by lawmakers.

The bill before the house, the Interpretation of Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, makes a number of significant amendments which may be technical in nature but which can by no means be reasonably considered to be the sort of changes attributed by those opposite — namely, dots and dashes, which I think was suggested by Mr Rich-Phillips in his contribution. The substance of the bill was again denigrated by Mr Ondarchie, who suggested that as legislation goes it is not as important as it could be.

As we heard from Ms Symes, the bill amends the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 (ILA) to include common definitions rather than locating them in individual acts and subordinate instruments. That harmonisation process is a very important part of making sure there are common understandings, and it simplifies the drafting of legislation and subordinate instruments. These issues may be seen as trite or irrelevant by those opposite, and that is unfortunate; however, we think they are important to get right.

The bill also includes three new interpretive provisions to clarify the interpretation of acts and subordinate instruments, and they provide the chief parliamentary counsel additional powers to authorise limited stylistic amendments to legislation and subordinate instruments. This last point is important. The chief parliamentary counsel is eminently qualified and is a leading mind in relation to the proper drafting of legislation that adequately and clearly sets out the intent of various policy statements by government.

Clause 1 sets out the two key purposes of the bill. The first purpose is to insert the definitions of ‘police officer’ and ‘registered medical practitioner’ into the principal act for use in all Victorian acts and subordinate instruments, unless of course there is the expression of a contrary intention within that act or subordinate instrument. The second purpose is to provide for three new interpretive instruments to be used in the construction of Victorian legislation and subordinate instruments. This is a prime example of setting foundations in place to make the drafting of legislation a more streamlined, efficient and accurate

process. As Ms Symes indicated, and as set out in the explanatory memorandum, the three interpretative amendments relate to indemnity or immunity provisions which have ceased operation, decimal numbering of parts in legislation — as Ms Springle indicated — and the power to delegate.

Mr Ondarchie — Contain your excitement, Mr Herbert.

Ms SHING — Mr Ondarchie may well think these matters do not warrant the careful attention of the Parliament; we, however, do not agree with him. As I indicated earlier, the second purpose is to allow the chief parliamentary counsel to authorise particular style changes to acts and statutory rules to bring them into conformity with current drafting style when they are reprinted or otherwise published. The updates that will be permitted include formatting, schedule and form headings in sentence case rather than all capitals, the italicisation of citations of act by title and the omission of lines at the end of legislative parts.

The opposition inferred that these amendments allowing for font changes are just about the sum of the bill. In fact the delegation of these powers to the chief parliamentary counsel will remove the need for various changes such as these to be even brought before the house because they will be able to be made by delegated authority to the chief parliamentary counsel. In essence this is an efficiency measure, which means that matters such as those declared as trifling by those opposite will not come before the house as a consequence of the passage of this bill into legislation and amendments to the principal act.

The amendments are important because they are essential to the work of government, particularly when it is developing new acts and statutory rules. Although they are of a technical nature, they are important in clarifying aspects of legislative interpretation and, as I indicated at the outset of my contribution, in promoting consistency.

The bill is intended to commence on 1 July 2015, to coincide with the parliamentary winter recess, so that there is minimal impact on other bills that are before the Parliament and to make sure that we streamline its administrative impact.

Clause 4 of the bill inserts a new subsection into section 10 of the act, which provides for citation of acts by their titles in legislation, subordinate instruments, deeds and other instruments and documents. Acts may be cited by the title that appears before the enacting words or the preamble as applicable. At present an act’s

title is cited in bold, as Mr Ondarchie may be aware. Under this amendment titles of acts will instead be cited in italics. This is one example of the formatting changes. However, the bill does significantly more than that, which I am glad those opposite are starting to appreciate.

The indemnities and immunities in the acts are set out in clause 5 of the bill. That clause inserts a new subsection into section 14(2) of the principal act, which currently provides that where an act or a provision of an act is repealed, amended, expires, lapses or otherwise ceases to have effect, unless the contrary intention expressly appears in that instrument, that repeal, amendment, expiry, lapsing or ceasing does not revive or affect any of the matters set out in section 14(2). Those matters include any right, privilege, obligation, liability, penalty, forfeiture or punishment.

The amendment made by clause 5 inserts indemnities and immunities into the list of matters in section 14(2) that are not revived or affected by an act or provision ceasing to have effect. That means an act or provision can be repealed, amended, expire, lapse or cease without affecting any immunity or indemnity given under the act or provision, or any legal proceeding or remedy in respect of such immunity or indemnity.

The ILA already provides for the effect of provisions or acts that cease operation but does not specifically deal with indemnities or immunities. This amendment will clarify the position in relation to indemnities and immunities. One of the jobs of this place is to ensure that clarifications, wherever they are possible and reasonably able to be made in the drafting of legislation, are consistent, streamlined and thorough, to ensure that issues around interpretation are avoided wherever possible.

Section 14(2) of the ILA was designed to overcome the common-law rule that where a statute was repealed it was obliterated from the records of the Parliament as if it had never been passed, except for the purposes of actions commenced, prosecuted or concluded whilst it was an existing law. On this basis it was necessary to extend the provision to include indemnities or immunities under clause 5, so that if an act or provision related to an indemnity or immunity ceases operation, this does not affect the immunity or indemnity or any proceeding that may be on foot in relation to it. Whilst indemnities or immunities may already be covered by section 14(2) of the ILA, the amendment is necessary to put this matter beyond doubt. Putting matters beyond doubt to streamline the drafting of legislation is one of the key components of the role of chief parliamentary counsel. Where this role is discharged to the high

standard I have seen in the last decade we end up with a statute book which more adequately and accurately reflects consistent lawmaking and expression of law.

Decimal points have been adequately covered by contributions from my colleagues Ms Springle and Ms Symes. I now wish to move to the matter of including the definition of 'police officer' in the ILA. Clause 7 inserts a new definition of police officer into section 38 of the ILA which provides that police officer has the same meaning as that contained in the Victoria Police Act 2013. In that act police officer is defined as the chief commissioner, the deputy chief commissioner or assistant commissioner, or a person appointed under division 5 of part 3 of the Victoria Police Act 2013. That division provides that the chief commissioner may appoint a person as a police officer below the rank of assistant commissioner.

Section 38 contains definitions that apply to all Victorian acts and subordinate instruments unless the contrary intention appears. The amendment made by clause 7 of the bill will allow the definition of police officer to be used across the statute book without the need to further define it in future acts or subordinate instruments, such as statutory rules. This definition of police officer was chosen because it is already widely used in Victorian legislation — for example, the Surveillance Devices Act 1999 and the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. If the intention is to include a different definition of police officer in future acts or subordinate instruments, then that must be set out in a subordinate instrument or another act in order to override the ILA definition if necessary.

The same situation applies in relation to registered medical practitioners in the ILA. Clause 8 of the bill inserts new section 38EA, defining 'registered medical practitioner' as 'a person registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to practise in the medical profession'. This definition, incorporated into the ILA as a consequence of the bill, will apply to acts and subordinate instruments that are created on or after 1 July 2015 or that are in existence before that date but where the term registered medical practitioner is inserted after that date. The new section allows that the definition of registered medical practitioner will be able to be used without further definition in future acts or subordinate instruments. That again reduces the risk of confusion, ambiguity or inconsistent drafting.

There is no retrospective operation proposed for the amendment to the definition of registered medical practitioner. It will only operate prospectively to avoid any impact on acts and subordinate instruments already in operation. It intentionally does not operate

retrospectively so that we can continue to have existing definitions in place. Again the 1 July 2015 date was chosen to ensure that bills before Parliament at the same time as this particular bill will not be affected.

The definition of ‘registered medical practitioner’ in the bill has been chosen to make sure that we take account of Victorian medical practitioners being registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, which itself has application in Victoria pursuant to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Victoria) Act 2009. The absence of a definition in that act and the national law means that we need to make sure that term is incorporated.

In relation to the bill limiting the power to delegate, where a power of delegation is included, it is common for the delegation provision to provide that that power of delegation does not include the power to delegate.

The authorisation of additional stylistic changes is something which I have spoken on already, so without further ado I commend the bill to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — That was a great speech by Ms Shing and really worth listening to — in quotation marks, with sarcasm.

I will make a brief contribution on the ILA bill — the term Ms Shing used to refer to the bill — the Interpretation of Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. But I will go down a different path. Instead of talking about how many commas there are in the bill, I will talk about it in the context of the *Alert Digest* prepared by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC). As was indicated by the many previous speakers in this debate, the content of the bill ranges from act titles to how they appear. However, the principal provision is about the additional powers of the chief parliamentary counsel. It is important for members to understand that a lot of work is done with the chief parliamentary counsel in the drafting of bills and determining a range of legislative changes that should be made, and also in relation to the work that SARC does.

I note there are two further bills on the notice paper — the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2014 and the Statute Law Revision Bill 2014 — on which SARC reported. The committee also took evidence from the chief parliamentary counsel.

In terms of the additional powers for the chief parliamentary counsel, SARC noted that the bill inserts three new interpretative provisions in the act. The committee also noted on page 7 of *Alert Digest* No. 1 of 2015 that two of those provisions engage the

committee’s terms of reference. I will just talk briefly about those. The first one is that section 17(a)(i) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, relating to rights or freedoms, is engaged. Two new paragraphs are inserted in section 14 of the principal act, which provides that the repeal, cessation, lapsing or expiry of an act or provision does not, unless the contrary intention expressly appears, revive or affect any of the matters prescribed by the section. That is explained in the second-reading speech to the bill, which states:

This will ensure that outdated provisions or acts may be repealed or expire or lapse without affecting rights and protections. The Interpretation of Legislation Act already deals with other types of provisions that cease operation; this amendment will clarify the position in respect of indemnities and immunities.

The second amendment that engages the committee’s terms of reference is in relation to section 17(a)(ii) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, which relates to administrative powers. The bill provides that a power to delegate in an act or subordinate instrument does not include a power to delegate the power of delegation. At present this constraint on subdelegation is ordinarily included in the individual delegation provisions of acts.

As members will hear from those references to the SARC report, it is a quite complex bill in the sense that it has to work through some areas around rights or freedoms and administrative powers contained therein.

Having said that, I note that the charter report in the *Alert Digest* confirms that the bill is compatible with the rights set out in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. It is one of those rare occasions where the rights and liberties of the charter are not affected, but it does impact on the Parliamentary Committees Act, and that is where SARC will undertake a more detailed examination of the report.

I thought that in my contribution, albeit brief, I would just talk about the importance of SARC in that it continues to undertake an overlay role in relation to what some would class as very simplistic bills but which are also complex in the longer term.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Interpretation of Legislation Amendment Bill 2015.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LEANE — I note the interjections coming from the other side. I would have thought that if I, as an Oakleigh tech year 10 graduate, could acknowledge that it is very important that the chief parliamentary counsel make sure that grammar and plain language be

incorporated into all our legislation, members on the other side, who may have gone to more prominent schools for a longer time, would appreciate the absolute importance of this bill.

I congratulate Ms Symes and Ms Shing — and other speakers also, but particularly them — on their fantastic contributions, which will ensure that the house understands the importance of the process that the chief parliamentary counsel goes through every year. As Mr Ondarchie and Mr Ramsay will appreciate, this is a process that was gone through when they were in government and it is an important process which happens every year. It works alongside the important work that the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) does, and I acknowledge that.

I am a bit surprised that Mr Ramsay yelled out that the contributions on this bill were boring. I say to Mr Ramsay that if he is in here to be entertained, he has come to the wrong place. I suggest to Mr Ramsay that because this is an annual process, because the chief parliamentary counsel goes through this process — —

Mr Rich-Phillips — Three bills! Three separate bills!

Mr LEANE — I am not too sure why Mr Rich-Phillips is holding up three fingers to me, but I am glad it is not two.

Mr Ramsay — That would be unparliamentary.

Mr LEANE — Yes, that would be unparliamentary. I suggest to Mr Ramsay that maybe next year when this particular bill comes into the house for debate he talk to his whip about possibly not being on house duty.

Modern, plain language is important, and I try to use it in every part of my daily life. I am also quite happy that there is a provision in the bill to include additional powers for the chief parliamentary counsel to authorise stylistic changes to legislation, albeit limited stylistic changes. Acting President, as someone who is big on style and fashion — —

Mr Dalla-Riva — Reflecting on the Chair?

Mr LEANE — I am not reflecting on the Chair; I am actually complimenting the Chair. She is noted for her passion for the fashion industry and style, and she would see that it is very important that the bill allow for limited — do not panic, people over there; it is only limited — stylistic changes to legislation.

Mr Dalla-Riva interjected.

Mr LEANE — And you concur, so we agree and are all on board with this legislation.

Mr Ondarchie — Only 11 minutes to go, Shauno!

Mr LEANE — There is too long to go, and I am not going to make it. I am about to wave a white hanky and surrender. As I said, modern plain language is important, as are fonts. Do not get me started me on fonts.

An honourable member — Good old *Happy Days*.

Mr LEANE — Yes, I was a big fan of the Fonz. I remember as a kid watching television thinking, ‘He’s pretty cool, Fonz’. Fonz is important. He takes us all back to our childhood.

I note the importance of fonts. There are all types of fonts. When you are doing a Word document and you scroll down, there are so many types of fonts. The last thing we want is an inappropriate font being used in a piece of legislation. We would all agree on that. I cannot remember being more enthusiastic and happy to speak on a piece of legislation than on this particular one. I look forward to the process happening again next year. I cannot wait. I will be back. Mr Ramsay might think it is boring, but as a bloke who is visiting our great country at the moment said: ‘I’ll be back’.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time; by leave, proceeded to third reading.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES AND INQUIRIES ACTS AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Second reading

Debate resumed from 26 February; motion of Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State).

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased this morning to rise to speak on the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015. I say at the outset that the coalition will not support this committee bill that is before the house today. I note with respect to the parliamentary committees that, notwithstanding the fact that we have passed the 100-day mark for the Andrews government, the government is yet to form and

establish the majority of our parliamentary committees. To date we have not proceeded to appoint members to form the joint committees, and until this week we had not moved to appoint members of the upper house committees.

We are now only two sitting weeks away from the introduction of the budget in May, and to date the government has not yet gotten around to appointing the members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. That committee has an incredibly important role to play in the consideration of the budget estimates. The fact that we are more than 100 days into this government and only two sitting weeks away from the introduction of the budget and that committee is not in place and cannot do the preparatory work required for the estimates process is an indictment of the government and its failure to, firstly, be sufficiently organised and, secondly, be sufficiently committed to the parliamentary committees process to have that joint committee and the bulk of the other joint committees in place.

The bill before the house this morning seeks to collapse together a number of the existing joint parliamentary committees. It seeks to establish a new Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, which will replace the existing Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee and the Education and Training Committee. It combines those two committees into one new committee. The bill seeks to combine the existing Environment and Natural Resources Committee and the Rural and Regional Committee into a new Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee. It also seeks to collapse the existing Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee and Road Safety Committee into a new Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee.

The bill also makes amendments to the Inquiries Act 2014 to clarify the capacity of the government to amend letters patent for royal commissions and instruments of appointment for boards of inquiry that were established prior to the introduction of the Inquiries Act, and I state up-front that the coalition does not oppose that provision with respect to the Inquiries Act.

However, with respect to the provisions that relate to parliamentary committees, the coalition strongly opposes this bill which would lead to the abolition of three of the joint committees. I highlight the fact that this bill flies in the face of the now government's previous opposition to amendments to the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 in the previous Parliament. In the previous Parliament the then

coalition government established two new parliamentary committees with two new areas of jurisdiction. One related to IBAC; the oversight committee for that body was established. Additionally, an integrity committee to oversee integrity bodies in Victoria was established. As a counter to the establishment of those two new committees some of the then existing joint committees were reduced, but the number of committees remained the same. Two new committees were created and some existing committees were collapsed into the work of other existing committees.

Those on the other side, members of the Labor Party, screamed blue murder. They were outraged at the thought of replacing two existing committees with two new committees which recognised, firstly, that there were new areas that needed parliamentary oversight and it was appropriate that new committees be established, and secondly, that there was an existing pool of resources. That was the proposition the coalition put, and that was the proposition the Labor Party strongly opposed.

What we have now as one of the first pieces of legislation of this government is a proposal to abolish three committees, not because new committees need to be established in new areas but simply because the government wants to reduce the number of joint committees by three. Why does it want to do that? It wants to reduce the number of joint committees by three because it has reduced numbers in the Parliament. Between the two houses, with a reduction in the number of government members here in the Legislative Council and obviously going into government and having to appoint ministers and parliamentary secretaries, the government finds itself with fewer members who can serve on parliamentary committees, and therefore it wants fewer parliamentary committees. This is an entirely self-serving piece of legislation. The government wants to reduce the number of parliamentary committees because the government is struggling for competent members to populate those committees.

The coalition's perspective on this legislation is that those existing committees in their current structure perform valuable work for the Parliament. They undertake a range of valuable inquiries. They explore a range of valuable portfolio areas and areas of interest and policy interest to the people of Victoria, and they should be maintained in the current structure. The numbers in the Parliament have not changed. There were 128 members of this Parliament prior to the election and there are still 128 members of this Parliament. There are sufficient resources in terms of

numbers within the Parliament to staff these committees. It is purely because of the government's problem with numbers among its caucus that it is now seeking to collapse these committees.

The government argues that the three new committees replacing the existing six committees will be able to undertake references of the same breadth and nature. What that ignores is that they will not have the same number of members and staff available to them to undertake those inquiries. While they may have the technical jurisdiction by virtue of this legislation to undertake the same breadth of inquiries as the existing six committees, the reality is that they are not going to have the capacity to do so. We currently have six committees which can run six inquiries and hold six hearings simultaneously. The committees will have between them fewer members and most likely fewer parliamentary staff, and that means the breadth of inquiries that can currently be undertaken will no longer be possible. We will see a substantial diminution in the capacity of our parliamentary committees to run a broad range of inquiries.

The coalition's view is that the government has not made a strong case for this change. It is purely about the limitation in the government's own numbers. It is not about serving the best interests of Parliament, and it is not about serving the best interests of the people of Victoria. The coalition will not support the elements of the bill which relate to the reduction of parliamentary committees. We will, as I said, support the provisions relating to the Inquiries Act. Those are sensible provisions around clarifying amendments to letters patent and the appointment of boards of inquiry. They are sensible amendments to the Inquiries Act and the coalition will be happy to support that provision.

However, there is no basis for the abolition of three parliamentary joint committees, with the commensurate reduction in the capacity to undertake inquiries through those committees. Rather than seeking to collapse the number of committees available to the Parliament to undertake investigatory work we call on the government to populate the committees which already exist and let them get on with the work that needs to be done.

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak in the debate on the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015. The bill seeks to streamline the current parliamentary committees so that they become more effective and efficient.

In 2006 as a newly elected member of this Parliament I joined the parliamentary Education and Training Committee. During my time on that committee, which is about eight years, I have learnt more about the education system than I thought I knew as a parent of three children and as a former teacher. I have found the committee experience rewarding and stimulating. By and large members of all parties have worked together in a collaborative and cohesive way to maximise their time together and have focused on important issues facing the education community. However, one thing I do know is that collectively we can have well-intentioned investigations into various policy aspects of the Victorian education system and we can come up with sensible and productive recommendations to this Parliament, but without appropriate financial allocations to implement worthy strategies we might as well stay home.

The proposed committee amalgamations are an attempt to pair up relevant and valid portfolios within our parliamentary committee system. The Education and Training Committee should be linked to jobs and skills. In my view that is the ultimate purpose of our schools, TAFE and universities. They provide a conduit for learning and a practical career pathway for school leavers. I know there has been fierce debate in the other place about this issue, but to be honest the proposed changes to the Education and Training Committee make a lot of sense to me. The Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee will incorporate areas not covered by the current committee.

Other committees are in the same situation. There are areas not covered by the existing committees. These new areas of economics and job skills are important to the overall strategy for ensuring implementation of vigorous investigations, inspections and community consultation. The other committee inclusions are meant to be an improvement on the present operation of parliamentary committees. Change is evolution, and without change we all stagnate.

As I said, I have worked on and been a member of the Education and Training Committee for the past eight years, and I have looked at and studied the proposals in the bill that we are now debating. It is very important for the future of our children and youth that we include jobs and skills in the scope of that committee.

For the reasons I have outlined, I support the government on this bill, which proposes changes to the parliamentary committee structure. I commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr Rich-Phillips — On a point of order, President, is the Deputy Leader of the Government able to explain where the Leader of the Government is, given that question time should have started?

Ms Pulford — It is my expectation that the Leader of the Government will be here in just a moment.

Port of Melbourne

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Ms Pulford. With Premier Daniel Andrews indicating that rents will increase up to 800 per cent at the port of Melbourne, how will the minister ensure that these massive increases do not cripple the farming businesses of regional Victorians whose produce needs to pass through the port of Melbourne?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Drum for his question. As the member knows, the port of Melbourne is the freight and logistics hub of the nation. I share Mr Drum’s concerns about reported rent increases. I understand contract negotiations are ongoing between the Port of Melbourne Corporation and the stevedores involved. I expect that the Port of Melbourne Corporation will work with the stevedores to reach an agreement that is acceptable to all parties.

Supplementary question

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister for that answer. Quite simply, how can the minister guarantee that these incredible price hikes at the port of Melbourne will not be passed back along the supply chain to damage the farmgate produce for rural and regional farmers in Victoria?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I ask Mr Drum to reword that supplementary question because I do not believe the minister has direct jurisdiction over the port of Melbourne. Her role is that of agriculture minister, therefore I do not believe she is in a position to give a guarantee as she has no jurisdiction in the matter. The minister had already accepted Mr Drum’s substantive question and made some comment to assist him with that question, but I think his supplementary question goes wider than I would expect the minister could possibly provide an answer to, jurisdiction wise. I ask Mr Drum to reword his question.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — In the substantive answer that the minister gave, it was as if — and I do not want to prolong this — the minister

was acting as an observer to these negotiations. What direct action and what advocacy will the minister undertake for regional Victorian farmers about an intended supply chain increase in their cost of handling their produce?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I appreciate that the member has some difficulties with who is responsible for what. As the Minister for Agriculture I do have an interest in any possible impact on the cost of accessing markets for Victorian producers. I indicated in my answer to the member’s original question that I expect that negotiations will be ongoing and that agreement is being sought between the parties. The specific matter is not my responsibility as the Minister for Agriculture, but I share the member’s concerns about some of the reports about cost increases and certainly will represent Victorian farmers in everything I do.

Mr Drum — On a point of order, President, with the opportunity to put up an alternative or secondary question I was asking what direct advocacy the minister will undertake to ensure that these price hikes do not affect regional businesses. Again, the minister spoke about the issue, but she did not directly go to the point of what direct advocacy she will undertake in these negotiations.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The way I heard it the minister suggested she would continue to advocate in the context of her department.

Mr Drum interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is what I heard her say.

Level crossings

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State, who is the Leader of the Government. I ask the minister: will each of the Andrews government’s 50 proposed level crossing removals be evaluated under the high-risk, high-value assurance process to ensure that value for money is achieved and no taxpayer money is squandered?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank the member for what is a very detailed and — very unusually for Mr Davis — very precise set of words that he has put into his question. His answers were never quite as precise as the wording of his question today. The member will be aware that the government has made commitments in relation to the very important 50 level crossings project — a project

we are committed to acquitting in terms of our election commitment to make sure that we remove those dangerous level crossings which contribute so much to congestion across the community. That was a commitment that the Victorian community wholeheartedly embraced at the last election.

We have made undertakings about the procurement of Australian steel to be associated with the contracting arrangements. We are looking at ways in which we can guarantee that that can be achieved. We are certainly committed to the fact that they satisfy a very rigorous business case assessment and that we have rigour involved in the cost-benefit process for the Victorian community in a way that was never demonstrated through the east-west tunnel project — never. The all-the-eggs-in-one-basket east-west tunnel never satisfied a business case that was rigorous, that was fulsome and that was honest with the Victorian people.

Since coming to office the Victorian government has released the business case, which demonstrated that the east-west tunnel — —

Mr Davis — On a point of order, President, this was a very precise question about the high-risk, high-value process and whether the 50 level crossings will be subject to that. The minister has not actually got to the high-risk, high-value process as yet.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister has referred to the question. While he may well be engaging in comparisons with other projects in terms of costing and that may be bordering on debate, I would suggest that the minister is about to address the member's specific question.

Mr JENNINGS — Thank you for your great faith and confidence, President. The people of Victoria put great faith and confidence in the Andrews government to deliver on the 50 level crossings. Let us go back to the 50 level crossings and the business case that will be associated with each and every one of those 50. Each and every one of those 50 will be assessed rigorously by this government.

The member is looking at me and mouthing the words he wants me to say. It is actually quite fascinating that he thinks he has not only the prerogative to write the question — if he did write the question, and I would have serious doubts about that — but also the ability to write my answer. That is the extraordinary thing I have just witnessed across the chamber.

The Andrews government has of recent times announced the bringing forward of the business case

assessments for all of the 50 level crossings — some that may have existed previously and some that have in fact been brought forward by the Victorian government to ensure that we do satisfy our obligations, that the projects do have a positive business case associated with them, that they do return a net benefit to the Victorian community and that for every dollar that is allocated there is a positive return from the investment made in infrastructure.

The member probably has very little understanding of what high risk, high value is. He has a lot of understanding about high risk. That was the tenure of his term as a minister. It was a tenure of the process that the previous government entered into — —

Mr Davis — On a point of order, President, I think the minister is straying into debate and attacking the opposition rather than responding to a very precise question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! In respect of the point of order, I think that the minister was debating when he was reflecting on the member who has put the question and his term in office as minister. The question is actually about rail crossings. That member had no responsibility there, so the minister was straying.

Mr JENNINGS — Thank you, President, for your sage-like assessment of the capabilities of the former minister.

What I was indicating to the chamber was that there are previous projects that the government inherited and that had been undertaken through a high-risk, high-value process within Treasury. On coming to government, the government — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Supplementary question

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — That is the most imprecise answer that has been delivered in this place for many years.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I can assure the member that it is not the most imprecise answer I have ever heard.

Mr DAVIS — I note that the minister has not guaranteed a high-risk, high-value process for the level crossings. In that context, I draw his attention to a recent *Age* article about the Werribee Street level crossing, which is on the government's list and which

is, I am informed, to be used by only a relatively small number of trains from April, and I ask whether that particular level crossing will be subject to the business case focus that the government claims will be the case and whether that business case will be made public in full.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I would have thought that if the member were concerned about the imprecise nature of my substantive answer, he might actually have asked me a very focused question to try to make sure that I concluded the answer that I actually — —

Ms Wooldridge interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — No, he did not. He introduced a new specific element, which is one-fiftieth of the program that the government is committed to doing. My answer that I was about to complete was to make sure that members of the chamber know that this government does not shirk from its responsibilities of doing appropriate gateway assessments and business case assessments of the projects that we bring to the Victorian community and are committed to. We would expect a positive business case assessment of our 50 level crossing projects, including the project that the member refers to. It will be our intention to make the Victorian community extremely clear about the net value of our infrastructure investments, and in fact we will embark — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister's time has expired.

Industry and innovation programs

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Mr Somyurek. I refer to the minister's comments on 11 February this year that the department's secretary is undertaking a review of all programs, grants and initiatives within his portfolios, and I ask: is the Victoria-Israel Science Innovation and Technology Scheme under threat of being cut by the Andrews Labor government?

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I can only repeat the answer I have given on numerous occasions in this place before. We are reviewing all grants, programs and initiatives.

Supplementary question

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I thank the minister for his answer. Given that there is no guarantee that any scheme, let alone this scheme, will continue

under the Andrews Labor government, why are applications still open online for this scheme?

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I will have to take the specifics of that on notice.

Government contracts

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. I refer to the minister's comments yesterday during question time regarding sovereign risk. I refer to an article by Ken Phillips in the *Business Spectator* of 27 February, which states:

The cancellation of the contract for the east-west link trashes Victoria's international reputation as a reliable place to invest. From a sovereign risk perspective, it puts Victoria into Third World territory, not perhaps as bad as — —

Mr Somyurek — On a point of order, President, I was going to let the member go on, but he is verballing me. I did not talk about sovereign risk yesterday. The member himself yesterday talked about sovereign risk; I talked about contracts.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am afraid my memory is not that acute. The minister will have the opportunity to make that remark as part of his answer, if he wishes to. As I said, I do not recall the exact words used yesterday.

Mr ONDARCHIE — They can run, but they cannot hide.

Mr Phillips says:

From a sovereign risk perspective, it puts Victoria into Third World territory, not perhaps as bad as Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe but heading in that direction.

I ask: can the minister confirm that in more than 100 days of discussions, briefings and advice, no-one has raised the issue of sovereign risk with him?

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — As I said yesterday, over the last week we had more than 200 international business leaders in Victoria. They were here admiring our world-class, internationally renowned goods, services, technology and clean and green produce. On Saturday I was with 90 of those international business leaders at the food and wine festival. The day before I was with all 220 of them. The day before that I was with 16 Chinese delegates in Heidelberg visiting a chocolatier whose prime chocolate products are perfect for expansion into our regional economies. None of

those international business leaders raised the issue of sovereign risk.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Ondarchie, I can anticipate the point of order. I am not in a position to direct the minister on how to answer. He has provided some answer, and you can ask a supplementary question.

Supplementary question

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — As I said, President, they can run, but they cannot hide.

Given the commentary from this respected business leader of a small business peak body, will the minister now seek advice from his department on how to mitigate the sovereign risk issue to Victoria's trade relationships as a result of the cancellation of a government contract?

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I have been trying to be succinct in my answers to questions this week and I have tried not to debate and attack, but it is very difficult when the member starts off by prefacing his question with the comments he has made. I am going to resist; I am not going to bite. Of course I will be taking briefings on a range of issues. I am always being briefed by my department.

Public holidays

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. Issues of costs to government and Victorian small businesses are very important. As the minister responsible for the Summer Time Act 1972, what date and time does daylight saving end in 2015?

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I call the minister. I also ask that the clock be reset to 4 minutes.

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I can assure you, President, you will not need it. I have to say, President, they have got me on that one.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Daylight saving ends on Sunday, 5 April 2015, when clocks will go back 1 hour at 3.00 a.m. As the minister responsible for both the 5 April Easter Sunday public holiday and the 5 April conclusion to daylight saving,

has he ensured and will he ensure that his regulatory impact statement for the public holiday estimates costs to Victorian small businesses for 25 hours, not 24?

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Leane! Mr Melhem!

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I am not sure that actually qualifies as a supplementary in any case.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SOMYUREK — It is a good question. People do not work 25 hours a day; people work 8 hours a day or 12 hours a day.

Ms Wooldridge — On a point of order, President, I ask you to consider that answer and consider requesting a written response, given that it was non-responsive to the supplementary question.

Ministerial code of conduct

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State. The previous government had created a code of conduct for ministers as it related to, amongst other things, party fundraising. By the Premier promulgating that code and putting a state of Victoria stamp on it, it created a linkage between party fundraising activities and ministers involvement in those and governmental administration. I gather that this is not a code that continues to be endorsed by this government. Can the minister tell me if he will be bringing in a code of conduct that contains that element?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Barber for giving me probably the easiest answer I am ever going to have: no, this government will not introduce a contrivance to get around a ministerial code of conduct and the procurement of party funds.

In terms of the question that I was asked earlier in the week, predicated on a question that had been asked of the Premier about the standing of the ministerial code of conduct of the outgoing government, I stand by my answer. Until this government refines the code of conduct that was adopted by the previous government, my answer remains. In its published form, the code that I have seen did not include that item that Mr Barber referred to. It may have actually been able to be established within the terms of those guidelines, but not on the reading of the material that I have seen.

When there was speculation about when the code of conduct was taken down from the Premier's website, I was originally led to believe that it was in fact when Premier Napthine left office. I have subsequently been advised that it was actually taken down from being in a published form when Premier Baillieu left office.

I will have conversations with my colleagues, as I indicated the other day — with the Premier and my other cabinet colleagues — about not only the revisiting of the ministerial code of conduct within our government but also the way in which it will be conveyed to the Victorian community and the confidence that the Victorian community can have about compliance with that code of conduct. I can assure the house that there will not be a mechanism that includes the mechanism that Mr Barber has drawn to the attention of the chamber.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — The code of conduct for MPs that exists in statute already contains provisions that require ministers to devote their energies to their duties of office, so it is not as simple as ignoring that provision. Donations received by parties after 1 July last year will not be disclosed until February next year. How are we going to have confidence that ministers are making decisions without reference to any promises that could have been made by those same people when they were in opposition, or before they became ministers?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Mr Barber was here the other day when I answered the first question I was asked on this subject, and in that answer I referred to the complete suite of ministerial codes of conduct, the requirements that we have as members of Parliament, the obligations within the statutes and guidelines of our engagement with the Parliament, and the Parliament's legitimate expectations of our standards as members of Parliament. I did refer to that at that time. I referred to the cabinet process and the cabinet guidelines that also, in my view, comprise a suite of not only reference points and guidance but transparency provisions for the Victorian community about the way in which politicians, including ministers, behave in their public lives.

In terms of the issues that the member has raised, I am taking advice about whether there are additional features which need to be added to the accountability framework to address these matters, and I will consider them.

Duck season

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Throughout this week the minister has answered a range of questions about the arrangements in place for the opening of duck hunting season. She has referred regularly to the advice that she has received from her department and from various parties. Ministers like to be familiar with all aspects of their portfolio and not just sit in their offices and receive advice from the department. Can the minister tell me whether she has ever attended a duck hunting opening or event during duck hunting season so as to verify that the advice she has been given by her department in fact operates that way in the real world?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — No, I have not, and I do not have plans to attend the opening of duck season tomorrow either.

Government procurement policy

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Finance, Mr Jennings, and it concerns procurement processes in this state. On 11 September 2014 Victorian Labor issued a media release which stated a commitment to ensuring that the Victorian government's procurement processes support local jobs and local businesses. I highly commend this commitment, and the DLP looks forward to working with the government in this area. Can the minister describe for me the procurement processes that are currently in place for, one, giving priority to Victorian businesses, and two, giving priority to Victorian disability enterprises?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Dr Carling-Jenkins for her question. It is a very important question for not only Victorian industry but also the way in which the Victorian government intends to engage with Victorian industry to try to drive jobs, greater opportunities or economic activity in our community. I appreciate the spirit in which she asked the question and her obvious concern to make sure that we have viable industries in Victoria.

The member will be aware that back in 2003 the then Labor government introduced the Victorian Industry Participation Program Act 2003. A number of key principles were embedded within that act to try to assist in the promotion of creating employment through creating viable business growth within Victoria. We do in fact have specific incentives and momentums to make sure that potential contractors and people who

purchase Victorian goods are made aware of what our state's capability is in terms of our industrial capability, in terms of our skills base and in terms of the products that we produce. Within the act we try to drive best practice and expose our businesses to innovation and ensure that they are established and maintained as internationally competitive. That is the framework by which that legislation acquits the government's policy settings.

The Victorian Government Purchasing Board arrangements are overlaid by a requirement for there to be value for money in terms of the way in which we, as a purchaser, want our contracts to be fulfilled. On both sides of the procurement arrangement we want to make sure that there is a proper market analysis and a bringing together of market capability to create a marketplace for Victorian industry so that the people who are investing, making new investment or new products or delivering infrastructure know that there is capability in Victoria. As a government we guarantee that in a variety of ways. We do it, for instance, in the way that I have already referred to in this question time. We have made a commitment as a government — for example, in our 50 level crossing projects — to try to achieve 100 per cent Australian steel within that procurement process and within the delivery of those programs.

We also understand the importance of local content within rolling stock. When we procure additional rolling stock in the future, it is the government's intention that 50 per cent of that is made up of local content. We make other commitments in relation to things such as workforce planning in that we anticipate that future major state projects will have a requirement for 10 per cent of the workforce to be apprentices, which will not only deliver for Victorian industry now but also build a workforce for the future.

The Victorian Government Purchasing Board requires government departments to produce a forward plan of their contract arrangements and procurement arrangements so that Victorian industry knows, over the horizon, what major procurement is going to occur now and into the future and they can align their productive capacity to take advantage of those contracting arrangements.

I advise the member that within the 6 seconds I have left I will not finish answering the disability question, but I can provide a supplementary — I volunteer that you come back on the disability side of the equation.

Supplementary question

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer and his overview of decision-making in procurement, and I note that he was about to answer my supplementary question. During 2013–14 Western Australia completed a four-year procurement reform project concerning procurement from disability enterprises. In 2014 New South Wales amended legislation to enable public sector agencies to procure goods and services directly from disability employment enterprises. What concrete commitment will this government make to ensure a greater level of procurement from Victorian disability enterprises?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The house may be amazed to learn that I did not know that supplementary question, but I did know from the substantive question that in fact Dr Carling-Jenkins asked me in her second point to comment about disability services and the procurement under the Department of Health and Human Services. Indeed as part of the undertaking of the Victorian government purchasing arrangements, there is an expectation that government departments — in this case, the department of human services — do give advantage to disability services currently, under current procurement arrangements.

The member has now drawn my attention to something beyond my knowledge base in terms of what other forms of incentives and legislative reforms and programs may actually build on that existing framework in Victoria to try to get even better results for services that employ and provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Weightings, as my colleague has encouraged me to think about. We will work on those, hopefully in a collaborative way, with Victorian industry particularly, to cater for those opportunities for disability employment agencies.

Wetlands environmental watering

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — My question today is for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade in his capacity as representing the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. Each year a draft of the environmental watering plan of wetlands around Victoria is put together by a collection of participating bodies, including interest groups, local councils, local catchment management authorities and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. The final result of this carefully planned watering program is given to the catchment management authority in the area to implement, after the Victorian Environmental

Water Holder has approved and published it. What measures are taken by the minister to ensure that the environmental seasonal watering plans are adhered to?

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I will take the question on notice and pass the details on to the minister in the lower house.

Supplementary question

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — In addition to that, does the minister consult with the catchment management authority and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder before any changes are made to these plans?

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I will take that question on notice and pass it on to the lower house minister.

The PRESIDENT — Order! In the context of questions asked today, Mr O'Donohue's supplementary question was different to the question that is written here; is that right?

Mr O'Donohue — The question that appears there is correct.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am going to have to review that, because I am not sure that the question here is the same as the question Mr O'Donohue asked the minister. Mr O'Donohue says it is; let me think on that.

Certainly Minister Somyurek will provide the answers in terms of the catchment issues. They will come from a minister in another place; therefore my expectation is two days of meeting for those, albeit that there is obviously some time before our next sitting day, so we might actually have those earlier.

I also indicate that I have agonised over Ms Wooldridge's request for a more detailed answer in terms of the 25-hour day. I will ask the minister to provide a written answer to that, based on the fact that the supplementary question actually asks the minister if the regulatory impact statement will take into account the 25-hour day rather than 24 hours.

Mr Somyurek — I can answer the question now.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It is irregular, but I will allow the minister to dispatch this one now if he is able to.

Public holidays

Mr SOMYUREK (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — Absolutely. The regulatory impact statement process will take into account the cost and benefits and any other matter that is pertinent to the holidays, including the 25-hour day.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I do not require a written answer to that one, then. The catchment management authority ones require a written answer, and I will look at Mr O'Donohue's questions later today.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Northern Victoria Region

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — I direct my constituency question to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. I recently had the pleasure of speaking with the mayor of Gannawarra Shire Council and some concerned locals of Kerang. After expressing their fear that the shire will not benefit from the estimated \$3 million economic boost to the local area from the duck season, one person asked me why certain areas that are open for shooting are dry and why, in that case, other areas which may also be suitable for hunting activities remain closed. These closed areas were published this week, and they include Kow Swamp. Kow Swamp is not closed, to my knowledge, because of any surveyed protected species. What other factors contribute to the closing every year of the swamp?

Western Metropolitan Region

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to ask a question of the Minister for Planning in relation to the City of Moonee Valley's proposed western metropolitan community service hub at 977 Mount Alexander Road, Essendon. The proposal is to build on land in my electorate valued at \$1 million, contributed by the Caroline Chisholm Society, a reputable pregnancy and family support service, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services. My constituents have also raised over \$300 000 towards the proposal. An application was made under the previous government to the Community Support Fund.

I note that this was a highly supported project across both houses in the last Parliament. I understand that the project has been through an open application process, and there has been little standing between the minister and approval of the funding. I therefore ask the minister to advise me of the progress on funding the western

metropolitan community service hub through the Community Support Fund.

Northern Victoria Region

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My question, which is also on behalf of the member for Benambra in the Assembly, Bill Tilley, is for the attention of the Minister for Education and regards Corryong College. During the election campaign the coalition committed \$2.1 million for a major capital upgrade of Corryong College. This commitment was in addition to other education commitments in the Benambra electorate, including \$4.3 million for upgrades to the Wodonga Middle Years College at Huon campus. Both commitments followed on from significant investment in the district during the coalition's term, including \$10 million for Wodonga Senior Secondary College, \$12 million for the new Belvoir Special School, \$3.8 million for Wodonga West Primary School and \$728 000 in additional maintenance funding for schools in Benambra.

In contrast, Labor made not one single election commitment to the Assembly district of Benambra. My question to the minister is: will the Andrews Labor government provide access to improved educational facilities for students and families by matching or bettering the \$2.1 million funding commitment for Corryong College made by the coalition?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My question is addressed to the Minister for Families and Children, and relates to playgroups for Victorian families. Can the minister update the house on the launch of National Playgroup Week and how the \$50 000 investment by the Daniel Andrews government to support community playgroups will benefit my constituents in Western Metropolitan Region? Can the minister also update the house on other initiatives that have also been planned to assist playgroups for Victorian families, particularly in Western Metropolitan Region?

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — On 13 March at 10.00 a.m. I attended a Southland station event, despite not having received an invitation, as I understand was the case with all non-government MPs. The protocols were not observed. The mayor of Bayside City Council and representatives from the Kingston City Council were not acknowledged, and neither were non-government MPs. Only government

MPs were invited to be photographed by staff paid for by the public purse. Using public resources in such a partisan way is demonstrably in contradiction to the Premier's commitment to preside over an accountable and transparent government.

I ask the Special Minister of State whether it is the intention of the government to continue to milk the public purse in such a demonstrably partisan way and to exclude non-government MPs from invitations to public events, as well as to not acknowledge their presence or participation at such events.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — Last night I attended one of the main runway shows for the Melbourne Fashion Festival. The show was a fantastic audiovisual production; it had a lot of style and drama. There were beautiful high-end garments made in Victoria. Although like the President I wished the models had smiled a little more, nonetheless it was a fantastic event.

Fashion and design contribute greatly to the hip pockets of many Victorians, whether it be through manufacturing, retail or events like Melbourne Fashion Week. It shows off our world-class design culture and further enhances our city's reputation as the fashion leader of Australia. I congratulate Graeme Lewsey, the CEO of Melbourne Fashion Week, and his team, and I call on the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade to work more closely with the Melbourne Fashion Festival to help the event evolve even further so that it may become one of the world's leading design experiences.

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it is in relation to the duplication of the Princes Highway west, which runs through my electorate of Western Victoria Region. The previous government allocated \$362 million in the 2014–15 budget for the upgrade of 37 kilometres of Princes Highway west. My questions to the minister are: what is the scheduled date for VicRoads to advertise a tender for the project, what is the planned date for construction of the project to commence, what is the current budget for the project and have any adjustments been made to the project budget since 1 December 2014?

Northern Victoria Region

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Families and Children, who yesterday launched National Playgroup Week with a \$50 000 investment to support new community playgroups. I am a former Playgroup Victoria member, and I was part of a playgroup that evolved out of my mothers group. It is a great way to meet other local parents and support each other as your children grow. I am still in contact with these families, and we meet regularly for coffee play dates. Can the minister provide me with details about how this initiative will help families in Northern Victoria Region and the ways that they can join or establish playgroups close to their homes?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is directed to the Minister for Planning. The minister recently said a review of residential zones will occur later in the year.

Mrs Peulich — Which year?

Mr DAVIS — I think 2015 is the answer. The previous shadow minister indicated there would be a review in Labor's election platform. Obviously the review will take place much later than most people expected, and many people are concerned about the impact of the review on their local area. I specifically ask with respect to the city of Glen Eira whether the minister can guarantee that there will be no diminution in the scope and extent of the neighbourhood residential zone and the protections that have been afforded to the community in the city of Glen Eira by the previous government.

Eastern Victoria Region

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — My constituency question is addressed to the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert. It relates to the funding and assistance provided to TAFE, specifically Federation Training, which is in Gippsland and has sought to provide as much support and assistance to students as possible. Since 2011 the TAFE sector has dropped from an operating surplus of \$109 million to a deficit of \$72 million — a massive 166 per cent decline. The TAFE market share has plummeted to 25 per cent of the total training market. The number of government-funded students at Federation Training institutions declined by 5282 between 2011 and 2014 — a massive 48 per cent. This was part of a broader closure. Can the minister outline the benefits

that the \$2.5 million for Federation Training will provide to students and their local communities?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The Tullamarine Freeway was again choked with traffic for its entire length this morning. As the north-western suburbs continue to grow, the situation will only worsen. It is now a regular event. My constituents can look forward to chronic traffic congestion on the Tullamarine Freeway for many years to come. Given that the government has scrapped the much-needed east-west link, what hope can the minister give motorists on the Tullamarine Freeway that their needs are on the government's agenda at all?

The PRESIDENT — Order! We have reached the full complement of constituency questions for today. I have allowed Mr Finn's as an extra question. As has been indicated, this is a bit of a learning curve, but there were two constituency questions I had some concerns about.

The first was Mrs Peulich's question. Whilst it relied on a particular event that happened within her electorate, the question asked about government policy in respect of members being included in photographs and acknowledged and so forth. That is obviously a valid question, but it is not what we expect of a constituency question. It could have been raised as a 90-second statement or an adjournment matter.

Secondly, Ms Patten called for an action by the government, which is more of an adjournment matter, although it may simply have been the way she phrased her question. A member would use the adjournment debate for a requirement rather than a constituency question. As I said, we are still coming to terms with how this should operate, so I did not rule the questions out as such.

I have now had time to reflect on Mr O'Donohue's question to Mr Somyurek. I was a bit confused because he had two supplementary questions, an either/or, depending on the minister's answer, and I was looking at the wrong one, so it is my fault entirely. The question Mr O'Donohue posed was in relation to why applications for a particular program — an innovation program — were still available online if the scheme is under review. The minister, as I understood his answer, undertook to check on that information. I ask the minister to provide an answer on that supplementary question by the next day of meeting.

Sitting suspended 12.52 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

**PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES AND
INQUIRIES ACTS AMENDMENT BILL 2015**

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — When we were debating the new sessional orders about a month ago I said they would take away the ability of minor parties within a coalition to talk for 45 minutes and that was going to annoy me two or three times a year. It has happened within about two weeks. I would love to be able to talk for 45 minutes on this bill, which diminishes the number of committees that operate within the Parliament. That is a retrograde step.

I have been in this place for 12 years, and I started off as a member of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. The work that committee did in the course of its inquiry into sustainable communities was quite phenomenal. We heard from people who were working in the sustainable energy industry. We had the opportunity to travel to Europe to look at some of the things that were happening in Germany and some of the trends that were emerging in other parts of Europe. The lessons learnt then by that committee are continuing to ring true and are manifesting themselves in the renewable energy journey that is now taking place in Australia.

I then spent a lot of time as a member of the Rural and Regional Committee, some as the chair, which was an honour. The committee inquired into such areas as rural and regional tourism. Most of Australia's tourism product is located in regional areas, and the same can be said for Victoria's tourism products. People come to Victoria and head down to the Great Ocean Road to look at the beauty of the south-west coast. Many of them then head off through the Otways. They might come back to stay in Melbourne and then head off to the wineries in the Yarra Valley and so forth. So much of our history and so much of our tourism product are in the regions. Unless there is a rural and regional committee to inquire into these issues, I suggest there will be a dumbing down of the Parliament.

There are incredible learnings to be gained from parliamentary inquiries, which is excellent for the members of Parliament who are lucky enough to serve on the committees and hear the evidence firsthand. It is also incredibly powerful for the people who elect us, because we are able to deliver recommendations

through our reports which will bring about change and a better future for our constituents.

The Deputy President was also a member of the Rural and Regional Committee during its inquiry into disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria. We had many a disagreement and tussle on that inquiry. But at the end of the day the evidence is the evidence — that is, the people in many of the regions we represent in regional Victoria are less educated, poorer and sicker than the state average. Unless you are a member of one of these committees and unless you hear the evidence presented to them, you are not going to have that understanding indelibly imprinted in your psyche, and that is the benefit of having a raft of committees that can go out to the regions and hear the evidence.

There are many benefits associated with having these committees. That particular committee also undertook an inquiry into country football, which tried to equate the values and worth of country football and netball clubs around the state. That inquiry and its report directly led to the country football and netball program, which is an investment by both sides of politics. Both governments have invested in the country football and netball program, and it has leveraged in the vicinity of \$60 million in projects around the state.

It is not just about the knowledge we gain; it is about bringing these issues to the fore. It creates an incredible legacy going forward to help our areas.

There was also an amazing inquiry done just last year into the supply and use of methamphetamines in the state, certainly around the regions. The Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, which undertook that inquiry, has now been absorbed into a law reform committee mixed up with roads and community safety. This is a watering down of its focus that I could not be more opposed to if I tried. For that reason I have to oppose this bill as stridently and strongly as I possibly can.

Over lunch today we heard about the biggest issue we face in this state — the disadvantage that exists within our Indigenous community. In the same vein, but to a lesser degree, a similar disadvantage exists in our regional areas, where people are less educated and there are greater levels of obesity and diabetes and a greater incidence of cancer — that is, worse health and less wealth. What are we going to do about it? We have had a capacity through the Rural and Regional Committee to get out to the regions and inquire into a raft of issues, many of which have centred on educational outcomes in rural and regional Victoria. The reports from those

inquiries make it unambiguous for whichever party is the government of the day that our educational outcomes and achievements in regional Victoria are substantially behind those enjoyed by our Melbourne cousins. If we want to represent healthy, wealthy, vibrant and dynamic communities, if we want the best for our people, then we have to continually put the point to this government that the journey towards wealth, health and wellbeing starts with education.

It is through the committees that we can bring these issues, such as the ice catastrophe that is sweeping across the state, to the attention of the government. Something like 50 recommendations were put together by Mr Ramsay's committee last year. It is one of the most pressing issues in the state at the minute. For the life of me I cannot understand why a government would want to take these committees and jumble them all up. It is not as if road safety is not a big enough issue to have its own committee.

Committees have taken some amazing trips in order to hear about what is happening in other places and other jurisdictions — for example, looking at road safety measures in other cities and other jurisdictions to see whether they are real and credible. The committee system we have had in the past has achieved an enormous amount of good for the state of Victoria, irrespective of which colour of politics makes up the government of the day and who is leading those inquiries. It has been a part of the Victorian Parliament that has led to better government in so many different ways.

What we have here is a bundling up of the former committees and then shrinking them down. As I say, it is dumbing down the Parliament. There are a number of issues in the community that need to be looked at, and the amount of work that needs to be done at the moment is phenomenal. No-one is to blame for the list of issues waiting for parliamentary committees to inquire into and report back on.

If we change the system, we will be heading in exactly the opposite direction to where we need to go. We need to be expanding the opportunities for parliamentarians to work together in a bipartisan manner to address and investigate these issues, coming up with recommendations, hearing from the experts out there in the field and hearing from the people who are living with these issues, whatever their respective issues of the day are. We must hear from the people who are living in that space and from those who have the expertise to present to a respected committee. That committee will then work behind the scenes with committee staff to come up with recommendations which are then

reported to the government, giving it the opportunity and confidence it needs to go away and set policy. That particular system is the only way to go.

We have more issues to deal with in the modern day than we have ever had before, such as the ability to overcome technological issues. We should be spending more time on those issues. We should be creating more committees and looking into more issues and finding more solutions. This change is effectively a snow job. We are going to be bundling together all these different aspects of our society and our community. We will have a whole range of credible references that are going to be sitting out there in the ether, waiting for an opportunity for a committee to investigate, and they will never see the light of day.

It is very disappointing that the government has opted to go down this path. It is a lost opportunity for members of Parliament from all sides of politics, especially backbenchers who are new to the chamber. The committee system gives those members the opportunity to meet people from the other side and to work together behind the scenes to bring about a better outcome for all constituents. You will never get a better understanding of the issue than when you travel out to the regions and sit down with the people who are living and working in that space, or when you meet someone right here in Melbourne who lives and works in the area. You are able to hear their day-by-day accounts of the issue that is being inquired into. It presents parliamentarians with a possible way forward, providing members with possible answers and giving members the opportunity to mull that over, to think through it, to work out what is feasible and doable and then to go away and put that report together, complete with recommendations, findings, case studies — the whole lot.

Again, it is a sad day when we are seeing all these committees bundled together. It is a bad sign for the government. It is a real whack to regional Victoria to lose a committee that has, since before my election to Parliament, in effect been set aside purely for rural and regional issues, whether that is to do with football and netball or whether it is to do with educational outcomes. We have looked into the tyranny of distance and a whole range of other issues, but it is a very sad day to see it all bundled together. I wish the government had a different take on what needs to be done for regional Victoria.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate on the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Act Amendment Bill 2015, which covers the area of joint

investigatory committees and also the Inquiries Act 2014 which was passed last year. The bill merges six existing joint investigatory committees to form three new committees. The three new committees are, firstly, the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, which will undertake the functions of the current Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee and the Education and Training Committee; secondly, the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee, which will undertake the functions of the current Environment and Natural Resources Committee and the Rural and Regional Committee; and thirdly, the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee, which will undertake the functions currently undertaken by the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee and the Road Safety Committee.

This bill is very much focused on these changes to the committees, but it also makes changes to the Inquiries Act 2014, which I will go to. I will then return in my contribution to talk more about the committees.

With respect to the Inquiries Act, the bill makes minor technical changes that include amending the definition of 'judicial officer' and amending the definition of 'member' and 'non-judicial member' in relation to members of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Under clause 12 it clarifies that the government may amend the letters patent of royal commissions and instruments of appointment of boards of inquiry that were established before the Inquiries Act commenced last year.

The bill also clarifies that witnesses who are expected to give evidence to formal reviews are entitled to be reimbursed for expenses when the establishing instrument for the formal review authorises this. Information on circumstances where a person attending a formal review may claim expenses or allowances in accordance with the prescribed scale is outlined in clause 14. One of those criteria is if the witness attends the review at the request of the formal review.

Last year the coalition government introduced the Inquiries Bill 2014 for an act to create the framework for the establishment and conduct of three types of inquiry that may be established by the executive at any time to inquire into any matter. The types of inquiry are royal commissions; boards of inquiry, which are a mid-tier option; and formal reviews, which are the lowest tier of inquiry and would not be able to exercise coercive powers and could only receive information that was given voluntarily.

I made the point last year that that is one way of doing it but that perhaps it would have been better if there had been some sort of public inquiry into how to do inquiries, as has happened in other jurisdictions. It would also have been useful to make reference to the Australian Law Reform Commission report *Making Inquiries — A New Statutory Framework*, which undertook a comprehensive review of the commonwealth Royal Commissions Act 1902. It also looked at the appropriate balances between powers of persons undertaking inquiries and the protections and rights and liberties of persons interested in or potentially affected by them, and the appropriateness of restrictions on the disclosure of information to and the use of information by royal commissions and other inquiries. Interestingly, that report recommended the establishment of two tiers of public inquiry, those being only royal commissions and official inquiries.

That having been said, the pertinent points there are that the amendments made by this bill are basically technical in nature and are therefore not opposed, but it is incumbent on the government to keep an eye on how this three-tiered system is working and whether it needs to be reviewed at some stage and perhaps look at replacing it with a two-tiered system as recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission, keeping in mind that the act that was enacted last year was not the subject of widespread consultation.

Going back to the substance of the bill, which refers to the merging of six existing joint committees to form three new committees, the Minister for Education, Minister Merlino, in the lower house and the Special Minister of State, Minister Jennings, in this house made the following comments in their second-reading speech:

Consolidating the functions of six joint investigatory committees into three will ensure that the committees operate more efficiently, and that workloads between different committees are better distributed. As the new committees will have the same functions of the committees they replace, there is no loss of coverage of the issues considered by committees. The new committees will continue any inquiries currently before the committees they replace. In addition, any members who have already been appointed to committees affected by the bill will continue as members of the relevant new committee.

I go to the statement made by the minister that the committees will operate more efficiently, that the workloads between the different committees will be better distributed and that there will be no loss of coverage of the issues considered by the committees. That is probably a debatable point and one that needs more consideration by the Parliament as a whole, meaning all members of both houses of the Parliament — the Legislative Council and the

Legislative Assembly — because in terms of this bill we are talking about joint committees. Everybody should be consulted and all parties — be that the government, the Liberal Party, The Nationals, the Greens, the Independent member in the lower house or the new crossbenchers in the upper house — should have the opportunity to consider these issues.

The committee structure, particularly in the upper house, has been a long-term interest of mine, and it is important that the committee structure allow for two things. They are: effective scrutiny of the executive and effective examination of issues of public interest and issues that may arise from time to time in the community, of which we have many examples. Both the joint committees in the Victorian Parliament and the various versions of the upper house committees have conducted inquiries into important matters, so there is that aspect.

There is also the aspect of allowing participation by all members of the Parliament in committee inquiries to one degree or another. I make the point that people can be appointed as members of committees in the other house. As applies to the three standing committees in the other house, members can also be substituted. One member could substitute for another member in a particular inquiry, and members can also be participating members — that is, they can participate in a particular inquiry without being a formal member of the committee. This mechanism of participating members is widespread across Australian parliaments but does not exist in terms of the joint investigatory committees in the Victorian Parliament.

I have prepared some amendments relating to the ability of all members to become, if they so wish, participating members of joint investigatory committees and also for those committees to have the capacity to appoint substitute members.

Greens amendments circulated by Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) pursuant to standing orders.

Ms PENNICUIK — As I say, the amendments that have been circulated will provide a capacity for members to be substituted on joint investigatory committees and also for other members to become participating members on those committees if they so wish, depending on the inquiries being undertaken at the time.

This bill also represents a bit of a lost opportunity. In terms of wider consultation within the Parliament, there has been a bit of a lost opportunity to look more

broadly at the structure of the committee system in the Victorian Parliament. This is an issue with which I have concerned myself ever since coming to this Parliament, as I am sure those who have been in this Parliament with me from 2006–07 will know.

As I say, it is very important that the committee system works well to enable scrutiny and investigation of important matters and also to enable participation in a way that is not onerous, particularly on the smaller parties, which of course will not have as many members to spread across the committees. That is why the function of participating members is very important, and as I said, it exists in other parliaments.

There is an opportunity here for us to look more broadly at how the other parliaments have set up their committee structures. Indeed we did that in 2009 following a proposal that I put forward which was supported by the whole Council that a reference be sent to the then Standing Orders Committee to look at the establishment of standing committees in the Legislative Council. At that time the committees that did exist in the Legislative Council were the Standing Orders Committee and the Privileges Committee. There was the Legislation Committee, to which any bill could be referred by the Council. If I remember correctly, only two or three bills were referred to that committee in the 56th Parliament. The major one was the assisted reproductive treatment legislation. I believe the committee spent quite a few weeks examining that legislation.

A couple of select committees were also established in that Parliament, and the Select Committee on Finance and Public Administration conducted two major inquiries. It was the Legislative Council's view, certainly as expressed by its support of that referral, that the Standing Orders Committee at the time examine the establishment of standing committees in the Victorian Legislative Council.

The Standing Orders Committee members met and looked at the structure of committees around the Australian parliaments, visited the federal Senate and the New South Wales Parliament, and spoke to the clerks and members of Parliament there. If I recall correctly, a former member of the Standing Orders Committee, Mr Viney, also visited the Western Australian Parliament when he was in Western Australia on another matter and reported back to the Standing Orders Committee on his discussions with members of Parliament there. Of course the committee had already had a look, on paper, at how that Parliament ran its committee system.

The committee found the Victorian Parliament's committee structure was quite a long way behind the rest of the Australian parliaments. We ended up establishing three standing committees. In terms of the subject matter they were based on the three major standing committees in the West Australian Legislative Council at the time. But in terms of their structure they were also based on the Senate references and legislation committees in the way they were set up and chaired. That is how those Victorian committees exist today.

I do not think I am out of line by saying the Leader of the Government at the time, Mr Lenders, was very keen that we look to the structure and function of the Senate committees when making improvements to the Victorian Legislative Council, and that was not a bad idea. The standing committees in Victoria do not have a self-referencing function, because the Senate committees on which they are based do not have that function. It would have been a good idea if we had had that function during the 57th Parliament because, as we know, despite the excellent committees and their excellent potential, the attempts by the then non-government parties to send legislation to them were futile because the then government opposed them on every single occasion, except for a Greens private members bill and, as I have stated before — but of course there are many new members here who will not necessarily know the history — the Wills Amendment (International Wills) Bill 2011, which the government referred to a committee for what remains a mysterious reason.

There did not seem to be any contention or opposition to that legislation or any matter in that bill that really needed closer examination. However, we received a report which told us in detail what the bill was about. It was a worthy addition to the information of Parliament, but it was not the type of bill that needed to be referred to a committee.

Sadly, the potential of those committees was never fully reached during the last Parliament. It was not as if the non-government parties were attempting to refer every single bill to the legislation committees that had been set up to examine bills. Of course bills are routinely sent to committees in the Senate, and it is a routine activity in other houses of Parliament across the Westminster system, but the former government in Victoria would not cooperate in the same way.

There were many pieces of legislation in relation to which there was both great disquiet in the community and many submissions made to us as members of Parliament. Many of those pieces of legislation, it was very clear, required some amendment. Those

opportunities, however, were lost. It is fair to say that one or two of the references that the former government sent to the references sides of those committees were quite good — —

Mrs Peulich — Which ones?

Ms PENNICUIK — and some were less good. I will take up Mrs Peulich's interjection. There was the inquiry into planning and health, which the Deputy President chaired. That was a very worthy reference, which enabled the Victorian Parliament to draw upon a large amount of work that had been done on this issue by other parliaments across the Westminster system and to receive submissions and hear evidence from very eminent groups in the community, such as VicHealth, the Planning Institute of Australia and a range of medical practitioners, academics and others working in the field, who gave us very good information. A very good report was produced, but unfortunately all the government members on that committee proceeded to denigrate aspects of the report in the Parliament, which was really quite unseemly. Sadly the opportunity presented by the very good recommendations of that report has not been taken up. However, the Greens have not forgotten some of the recommendations of that report, and we look forward to pursuing them in this Parliament.

The issue of how committees are structured in other parliaments is very interesting. I will take the example of the current committee structure in the New South Wales Parliament, which is a Parliament comparable to the Victorian Parliament. In the New South Wales Parliament at the moment there are 42 committees. Of those, 10 are joint committees, 12 are Assembly-only committees and 20 are Council-only committees. The joint committees are mainly — not entirely, because there are couple of exceptions — oversight committees. Those joint committees include, for example, committees with oversight of the advocate and guardian and oversight of the Health Care Complaints Commission. There is also the Legislation Review Committee, which is similar to our Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, and a committee with oversight of the Ombudsman and the Police Integrity Commission. There are a couple of other joint committees: the road safety committee, which is a self-referencing committee, and the committee with oversight of the Valuer General, a role that is the same as that of our Auditor-General.

From time to time select joint committees are set up to inquire into very important public issues. There are two in existence at the moment: one looking at the Mr Fluffy issue, which is about asbestos insulation, and

the other inquiring into the issue of child sexual offences. Generally speaking, however, the New South Wales Parliament does not have joint committees on subject matters or on legislation. It has a suite of Legislative Council committees and a suite of Legislative Assembly committees that look at issues across the community and that try, I presume, not to duplicate each other's work.

The joint committees are basically oversight-type committees. That is generally the case across the Australian parliaments and with the commonwealth Parliament. It is a model that I think we in Victoria should be looking at moving towards. You could see this bill as moving us towards that model in that it merges some of our committees, but moving towards the way other parliaments across Australia operate could be a broader discussion in this Parliament.

One of the other amendments I have circulated is an amendment to change the membership of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee so that those committees would have a non-government majority and a non-government chair. This is not something we have just started to talk about now. It was in fact March 2007 when this issue was first raised by Mr Barber in this place. That was in regard to the parliamentary committees acts amendment bill of that time. We put forward an amendment to change the structure and membership of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — not at that stage the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, although I also think that committee should not be controlled or chaired by the government.

Mr Barber and I have both spent two years on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. This committee performs several key roles. One is to hold inquiries and hearings into the budget and to have ministers appear at those inquiries. When I was a member of that committee there were 10 members: 5 government members and 5 non-government members. My experience was that the minister would come before the committee and give a very nice, glossy presentation, and a certain amount of time would be allocated to question that minister. The questions alternated between government and non-government members. Often the time for a minister would run out before other members got to ask a question, but nevertheless quite a few government members got to put their Dorothy Dixier questions to the minister. It was meant to be about scrutiny of the budget. It could not be seen as that; it was more show and tell. In its examination of the budget the Public Accounts and

Estimates Committee should be a bit more robust than that.

Another function of the committee is to follow up with departments on reports tabled by the Auditor-General. That has been a worthy, albeit quite slow, function of the committee. Not a lot of them are followed up and they take a long time, but nevertheless it is a good function.

While I was a member in 2009–10, the committee conducted an inquiry into and produced a report with some very good recommendations on the Audit Act 1994. They included allowing the Auditor-General to follow public money that went into the private sector where the government had engaged in public-private partnerships or contracted out services to the private sector using public money to do so. Auditors in Australia, New Zealand and Canada — where our current Auditor-General comes from — have that function, but the Victorian Auditor-General does not. More and more public services are being contracted out or being provided through public-private partnerships using public money. It is very important that the community of Victoria be assured that that public money is being spent wisely and according to purpose. Because of the gap in the Audit Act the Auditor-General is less and less able to assure the public of that.

During the 57th Parliament I raised this many times by letter and in the Parliament with the former finance minister, who made assurances that something was going to appear, but it never did. Given the recommendations in the report by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and given that auditors in other jurisdictions have that function, hopefully this government will introduce some legislation to amend the Audit Act in this way.

I have had circulated amendments that relate to participating members and substitute members of all committees. They include proposals that the chairs of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee be non-government members and that those committees not be dominated by government members.

I turn briefly to address the reasons for the amendments I propose for the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC). There is quite a workload for members of that committee and generally they do a great and diligent job, as do the staff of that committee. They examine legislation and regulations and hold them up against the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. However, in the last Parliament I was

very disappointed, to say the least, with the inquiry by that committee into the charter. This point is apposite to what members have been debating this week in considering the Summary Offences Amendment (Move-on Laws) Bill 2015.

When the then coalition government introduced an amending bill last year, SARC received an amazing and quite unprecedented number of submissions on the proposed legislation. I wrote to the chair of SARC at the time, requesting that a public hearing be held on that bill to allow people to speak to their submissions. That was refused. So when it came to very important issues the committee refused to open up its consideration for more scrutiny and public discussion. That is why I have included in my amendments that that committee needs to be more independent of the executive government.

The last issue is the very important resourcing of the committees, in particular the committees of the Legislative Council. The budget for joint investigatory committees is quite large, involving millions of dollars, whereas there is no dedicated budget for Legislative Council committees. This debate provides an opportunity to look at that issue more broadly and to consider enabling the standing committees of the Legislative Council to be properly resourced with staff and budgets for assisting witnesses or for members to go on site in relation to any matter committee members are inquiring into. There certainly needs to be more adequate resourcing of the Legislative Council committees going forward.

The bill provides members with an opportunity to look more closely at a lot of issues rather than simply passing the proposed legislation, which just collapses the committees into a smaller number of them, or any other similar legislation without considering more broadly the committee structure across the whole Parliament. We can consider committee functions, the resourcing of committees and the membership and chairing of committees. This should involve the Parliament because the committees belong to the Parliament and the people, not to just the executive government.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I rise to speak in support of the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015. In doing so, I note the contributions by members across the Parliament about some of the fine work that is done by our parliamentary committees. Our colleagues who are members of committees undertake responsibilities on wideranging topics.

Over recent days and weeks the government has been engaged in discussions with members of other parties about what is the best way for us to establish the committees that will support the Parliament in its work over the next four years. We have found something of a lack of willingness by non-government members to engage on this topic, but I hope that ultimately common sense will prevail and we will be able to come to an arrangement that is acceptable to all members of Parliament.

This bill interacts with some of the other discussions that are going on in the Parliament at the moment, including around the sessional orders that will apply in the Legislative Council for the duration of this term. On the notice paper there are motions from the Leader of the Opposition that propose one course of action. As members would be aware, a matter that has been referred to the Procedure Committee is another motion from the Leader of the Opposition proposing an alternative set of arrangements.

The government is keen to sit down with a group of people who represent the diverse views of the members who make up the chambers of this Parliament and seek agreement on a workable composition. As members of Parliament we should all be acutely aware of our ongoing challenge in resource management. We have finite time and finite dollars to support the work of our parliamentary committees. This bill streamlines that work somewhat but it cannot be considered in isolation from the discussions that are occurring about how many parliamentary committees the Council will have, because the same people will be members of them. The joint investigatory committees that we as members of the Legislative Council, along with members of the Legislative Assembly, will populate will inevitably cause some members to be engaged in the work of multiple committees, so we need to keep it manageable and remain conscious of our obligation to properly use resources.

There has been some discussion by and a proposal from non-government parties about the establishment of a public administration committee, but little consideration has been given in the discussions to how committees will interact and the extent to which a public administration committee might duplicate the work of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) or the three pairs of standing committees that were established and operated for the first time in the last Parliament.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on Economy and Infrastructure in the last Parliament, and the same people were members of the legislation and

references committees, as was the case with the other two sets of standing committees. Those committees were established under standing orders after a great deal of collaborative work by members of all parties — all parties back then, not all parties now — who sought to provide for the Victorian upper house something that is a little reminiscent of the Senate committee system.

Our experiences in the last Parliament were somewhat mixed, but we did not fully explore the opportunity to use those committees properly. The committees, as members who were here in the last Parliament would appreciate, infrequently sat concurrently. In effect the committees took it in turns so the government could have the house rise early on Wednesday nights for the best part of four years.

We did some work. The former government asked the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee to contemplate federal-state financial relationships as they related to primary health care and aged care. We contemplated a bill related to car dooring and bicycle and road safety, which has again been in the news quite a bit in recent weeks following a tragic accident in Melbourne's inner north. However, I think committee members on the whole found it to be an under-utilisation of the committees.

The standing orders provide for those committees to interrogate the published annual reports of departments. Each department is assigned to a committee, so there is a formal relationship established by resolution of the house. We have not properly explored how we can use the existing committees. If we properly use the three existing committees, or six if you count the pairs as separate committees, there is no need to create extra committees sitting over the top of those committees, which have a remit under the standing orders to contemplate every aspect of public administration in this state — scrutiny of departmental work, programs and legislation, either at length or in a short, sharp referral, as circumstances suggest is appropriate.

We would welcome a sensible discussion with the other parties about how this framework should fit together and how upper house committees ought to work in this Parliament. I am yet to have anyone explain to me what a public administration committee as proposed by the opposition could provide that the existing committees do not already provide — for example, the oversight of PAEC and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I urge members to contemplate fully utilising our existing upper house committee structure.

The government has entered into these discussions in good faith and continues to extend an invitation to the

other parties to engage in a discussion with us about how the parliamentary committee system will work as a whole — the joint investigatory committees, the oversight committees, the upper house committees and various other permutations. We do not need to be duplicating our effort when we have so many committees already.

Mr Drum talked in some detail about the work of the committees he has been a member of, and I agree that parliamentary committee work can be some of the most effective work that members of Parliament do. In the last Parliament I had the great pleasure of sitting next to Johan Scheffer, who frequently described to me the work that I think he was most proud of in his time as a member of Parliament, and that was some of the work he did on parliamentary committees. He was an enormous advocate of the work they do — taking a debate or problem away from a combative environment like this or out of the public domain by putting a group of members of Parliament in a room to hear evidence, consider the submissions of experts and work on the problem. I had many conversations with Mr Scheffer over the years about what a wonderful thing it is when it works well. I have seen it work well and I have seen it work badly, but we can do some great things.

Yesterday I made a public statement about the government's legislation in relation to giving effect to a moratorium on breed-specific legislation, which is an election commitment. That is but one part of it and a modest piece of legislation we will get to in this place in due course, no doubt. The second part of the election commitment is to ask a parliamentary committee to contemplate whether or not breed-specific legislation is the most effective way to ensure community safety. The views of various expert organisations have changed since the legislation was first introduced. We do not propose that inquiry with any agenda or preconceived notions other than to note that the veterinary profession, animal welfare organisations, local councils that get caught up in unworkable laws and even the Supreme Court have urged us to reconsider the framework.

At the moment we have a breed-specific legislation regime where a dog catcher says, 'That's a pit bull terrier', and the owner says, 'No, it's not', and the dog catcher says, 'Yes, it is', and the owner says, 'No, it's not', and this goes on and on for months or even years, causing enormous conflict and great cost to local councils. These things routinely end up in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and even on occasion in our higher courts.

The one thing that does seem to be agreed upon is that the current regime is not very effective, so I am proposing that a parliamentary committee take the opportunity to go through the issue with a fine-tooth comb, to contemplate the latest in national and international best practice and to hear from experts and organisations, some of whom were supportive of it when breed-specific legislation was introduced into the Parliament because it was the best option at the time but who now have their doubts about it. On that specific issue, community safety always needs to come first. That will be the thing that will no doubt guide the work of parliamentary committee members while they ponder this problem. That is but one example.

Another issue that Parliament has had some contemporary debate about is the government's view on unconventional gas exploration. Mr Drum has certainly asked about that issue. I know that for the parties who were involved in the Gippsland South by-election in recent weeks and for the community there this has been an issue of great interest and has been aired often. Again, the government would propose for this difficult question to be considered by a parliamentary committee. My colleague Ms D'Ambrosio, the Minister for Energy and Resources, will be making arrangements for that work to commence. Again, it is an issue on which we need to proceed with great caution to ensure that in the long term the environment, the community and agricultural production are not put at risk by new ways of sourcing an energy supply.

Parliamentary committees can be invaluable for governments and for the Parliament. They enable members to take the time and have adequate support, through the parliamentary staff and expert advice offered by organisations across Victoria, to work in detail through complicated issues. The government is very keen to see the passage of this legislation. We are keen to have a sensible discussion with non-government parties about how this sits with the Council sessional orders and how we propose to have an approach to parliamentary committee membership that is representative of the membership of the Parliament. In this Parliament we have a greater number of crossbench members than we have had — probably ever; perhaps the clerks could correct me on that point.

Mrs Peulich — Time!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order!
I thank Ms Pulford for her contribution.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I take the opportunity to make some comments about the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015. I am not sure exactly how many parliaments I have served, but I have served a few, this being nearly the end of my 19th year in Parliament, which includes 10 years in the Assembly and now 9 years in the upper house. So I guess I am drawing on some experience and can hopefully make some comments that put a number of these debating points into context.

I believe in the importance of committees. Committees that look at complex social issues or complex issues that a society confronts, with a view to medium and long-term policy development, can shape the decision-making of governments, especially where their work has been comprehensive, where it is sensible, where there is bipartisan, or — dare I say — now multipartisan support, and where it can be implemented and does not end up collecting dust on a shelf. I hold a slightly different view to that of Ms Pennicuik. I think that where a committee's work is truncated and politicised and it is not operating in good faith, it is not only a right of every single member of Parliament to submit a minority report, but it is an obligation.

I am concerned about the fact that these committees are not yet up and running. The Premier, Daniel Andrews, has put out a commemoration of his 100 days in Parliament with a missive to his supporters with the opening lines saying, 'Dear' so-and-so, 'we have not wasted a minute' — that is, since being elected. But let me say, the government has wasted 144 000 minutes in failing to implement the committee system in this Parliament. Stalling and delays are very good tools and political tactics, especially when it comes to, for example, stalling the establishment of the important Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) to deal with some very important issues that the government now needs time to contend with — that is, its claim that it had shovel-ready projects and that those projects were fully funded. Clearly, neither was the case.

I am greatly concerned at what the government calls the streamlining of the existing six committees that are the subject of this bill into three in order to gain efficiency. There is a better way of gaining efficiency. It should abolish them; that would be highly efficient. So many portfolios will be rolled up into the three committees that it will just make a mockery of the committee system. I prefer to use Ms Pennicuik's term — that it is a 'collapsing' of the committee system. The ability to pursue a smaller number of committee members as a result of more finely balanced Parliaments — not just

this term but also last term — means that less work can be undertaken by the committees, especially ones that represent or encompass a number of portfolios as well as geographic regions.

The Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee in the previous Parliament handed down a report that was 700 pages in length, and a lot of the recommendations were very good recommendations, supported by all political parties. I have had the privilege of working on a couple of landmark committee reports in my 19 years of service. I served 10 years on the Family and Community Development Committee, served on the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee and a range of others, including the Economic Development Committee, and chaired the Environment and Planning Legislation Committee of the upper house.

The most constructive, lasting and memorable work that I think was undertaken was by the Family and Community Development Committee on its *Inquiry into Planning for Positive Ageing* report. We were lucky to have a former Minister for Health, Caroline Hogg, serving on that committee. Despite the fact that she was a member of the Socialist Left, I had never come across a person who was more constructive and reasonable to deal with. She played a crucial role — with myself, dare I say — in generating quite a bit of that work.

Ms Shing — Despite the fact?

Mrs PEULICH — No, not despite the fact; she was highly intelligent and a person of great integrity. I hope you are not impugning her credentials?

Ms Shing — No. I thought you said, ‘Despite the fact she was a member of the Socialist Left’.

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, but obviously her romantic idealism and affiliation to the Socialist Left was tempered by her experiences as a minister of the Crown. Dare I say it, I valued the contribution she made.

This government has stalled the establishment of PAEC. It is streamlining, collapsing and under-resourcing the committee system — and that spells doom. In the government’s first 100 days it has nobbled the committee system, which is definitely in need of CPR. The Premier needs to make sure that these committees are implemented forthwith. He promised to make his government more accountable and transparent. In the first 144 000 minutes he has failed to do that by nobbling, stalling and collapsing the committee system. I believe, at the end of the day, they

will be under-resourced; that way they can do less work. But that work is very important.

Just to put a few things on the record, I believe that the joint standing committees should be given references that essentially deal with policy or themes. They should deal with new territory that brings the two chambers together so that we have different parties around the table, applying their minds to the most challenging social and political issues, engaging and interfacing with the community, with key stakeholders and with experts out to map a blueprint for the way forward for not just the current government but successive governments. Upper house committees have a crucial role as committees of the house of review, despite there being a number of ministers in the upper house. I am perhaps of a different view to many of those in the chamber, but I believe that much of the work of the upper house committees should be in fulfilling that scrutiny of government and review role. I do not believe that new policy work should be done exclusively at a single level of the Parliament but should involve both chambers.

I will work with whatever system is in place, provided that it has not been stacked, provided that it is resourced and provided that it has not been manipulated. There is enormous opportunity for members of Parliament to grow and develop. There is enormous opportunity for the public and the experts to be engaged and find attentive ears through the work of these all-party committees. It is an important part of the work of the Parliament. As far as I am concerned it is a critical responsibility of the Parliament, but the next most critical responsibility — subordinate even to my role as a mother and a spouse — is the workings of the committee system. I take that work very seriously. Not every work is a work of genius and not every work is a work that one wants to put their name to, because it can be painstaking and is often a compromise.

The most frustrating thing when working on a committee is when a certain group gains the majority and then uses that power to diminish that committee. I have even seen it with the Greens, who espouse the importance of the committee system, the importance of our democratic institutions and importance of the right of everyone, no matter whether they have the power or not, to be heard respectfully and equally. On the odd occasion I have seen the Greens relishing their power to be able to put forward their ideas and recommendations, no matter whether or not the opposing parties support them, therefore necessitating a minority report.

There has to be the right culture and disposition. There has to be a structure and a system. The structure and membership of the committees has to be thought through, and there has to be goodwill. Committees form a very important part of the machinery of parliaments. Reducing the numbers of committees can be seen as nothing else but nobbling the workings of the Parliament, diminishing its ability to scrutinise the activities of government and to develop future policy on new frontiers. That is the loss that any Parliament would bemoan.

I had a look at the contribution of the Minister for Education, Mr Merlino, to the second-reading debate. He stated:

Consolidating the functions of six joint investigatory committees into three will ensure that the committees operate more efficiently ...

Yes, it sure will. You could reduce them to none and have a highly efficient committee system.

Further he said that there would be no loss of coverage of the issues considered by committees. That is an absolute joke when you consider the many important portfolios in such important geographic areas such as, for example, the interface communities of the Casey-Cardinia area, which I represent, and there are other areas which deserve a greater opportunity to have the committees consider references that are pertinent to their challenges as well as the challenges facing any government in the Parliament of the day.

Mr Merlino goes on to try to justify the government's actions in the most transparent and blatant way. The Parliament of Victoria information sheet 6 sums it up well. It states:

The work of committees contributes greatly to the functions of government; better administration and policymaking results from the detailed investigations the committee system generates. Not only do committees enable members of Parliament to be better informed on issues, thus improving their contribution to policy and legislative review, but committees also provide a forum for input from both individuals and community interest groups. Committees also generate an exchange of views across party lines. Furthermore, committees can be important sources of information themselves through facilitating public awareness of Parliament's activities.

There is no doubt that committees can also be abused, and Ms Pennicuik referred to the fact that in the previous government there were very few requests to refer legislation to the upper house committees when it was evident that the Greens did not agree. It was just a political tactic to stall the passing of legislation and to sabotage it. Whilst I believe in the absolute importance

of committees, I also note that at the end of the day they can be used as a political tool or tactic, and they can be abused. The greatest abuse is stalling their establishment, especially the important Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — and I note that that has been established.

I do not know whether the Greens members have reconsidered their positions by joining the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which they refused to participate in during the last Parliament, and whether they intend to participate in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which they also refused to do in the last Parliament. I thought that was a great error on their part.

The delay in the establishment of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in particular is a travesty inflicted on this Parliament and the community. Clearly the government is scared. It is trying to nobble that scrutiny because of two key failings I think Victorians would realise have occurred: it did not have shovel-ready projects and they were not fully funded. Government members are afraid of those failings being exposed and being held to account for that.

I call on Mr Andrews and the Labor government to rectify their claims that in their first 100 days they have not wasted a minute — they have. They have nobbled and delayed the establishment of the important committee system, which goes to the very heart of their commitment to make this government accountable and transparent. The government should apply some CPR, not proceed with this bill, allow the committee system to be vibrant and robust, and continue adding to good policy development of not only this Parliament but future parliaments.

I have been here for 19 years, and I look forward to participating for many more — but not in a system that is withered, undermined, under-resourced and nobbled, as this bill indicates is the intention of the government. With those few words, I conclude my contribution and restate that we will be opposing this bill.

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — Unfortunately I think it is fair to say that the reputation of politicians and indeed of parliaments in many places around the world is at close to an all-time low at the moment. It is worth examining why that is the case. In doing so, I want to set the matters contained in this bill in a broader context, because that was the context in which the government, then in opposition, raised them during the lead-up to the election and the election itself. That was also the context in which some key policies that we put forward were considered by the electorate.

Parliaments around the world — here, in the UK, in the US, in many other Westminster systems and indeed in many non-Westminster systems — are currently the matter of much ridicule in the media. There are a number of reasons why that might be the case. We hear people talking about the 24/7 media cycle. We hear people talking about the fact that promises are not kept as often as they used to be. Whether that is true or not is a matter for some consideration at a separate time. It is of concern, however, because the reputation of parliaments is a matter of some import, I believe, to the functioning of good government. It is a matter of some concern that the population is growing increasingly cynical of and critical about institutions in our society.

Without getting down to too much detail in terms of political science, it is worth noting that we as a Parliament that is based on the Westminster system — though we share this with many other political systems — have a legislature, an executive and a judiciary. It is worth thinking about what it is that the legislature is here to do, and we need to look at the committee system in that broader context. We can also imagine what it is that the upper house might do in working alongside the lower house in relation to the legislature. Other speakers have already commented on some aspects of this. Obviously the key function of the legislature is to pass high-quality legislation in relation to policy matters that are of concern to society, and it is also to provide the public with some accountability of politicians and of the government in particular. The legislature also has a specific role in relation to holding the executive to account. There are other functions, but these are the ones that spring to mind.

Many people in society do not believe the legislature is fulfilling these functions well at the moment. It is not just here in Australia, and it is not just here in Victoria. If we look at the rating of performing well versus performing badly of the US Congress, that rating is at an all-time low — it is something like minus 50. If we look at the public standing of the UK Parliament, it is similar. We have to ask: why is that the case? Let us look at some of the most high-profile aspects of Parliament, in particular the way in which Parliament is held to account in terms of the public. One is question time. Question time, for good or ill, is by far the most high-profile time in Parliament, and question time is perceived by many people in the community as a bit of a farce, as highly contrived, as a bit of a circus and not as a way in which the executive can be held to account. It is supposed to be a time when ministers come into the chamber, are asked serious questions and are required to answer them.

When we look at the suite of reforms that this government took to the election, there were a number of critical reforms — some of which, I might say, had been proposed by the previous government at the election before. One of the changes, as we all know, was to remove Dorothy Dixers. Another was to change the powers of the President to require answers to be relevant, concise and so forth. These, I believe, were very worthwhile changes and were put forward by the government in a set of sessional orders that included not just those changes but also a series of changes in relation to committees, which we are discussing right now.

In addition there were other changes in the sessional orders around constituency questions, and that goes to the point I raised earlier about the Parliament being accountable to the public. There were other changes that I will not go into in detail now, but it is worth mentioning that broader context because what this government did, having won a mandate at the last election, was to bring in a whole suite of changes which included the removal of Dorothy Dixers, increased powers of the President to make answers relevant, constituency questions, ministerial statements and a whole raft of other reforms to make the house operate in a more effective manner — as well as changes to committee structures.

We just heard the previous speaker complain about the delays in setting up the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), but if this house had allowed the changes to go through that were approved at the election — and this government won an election based upon very clear priorities that the electorate supported — we would have a much more effective system of operation in place. We need to look at the bill in that broader context. The bill is not just about how many committees there are or about their composition or scope, it is really about a broader set of reforms that we need to bed down to make this house operate more effectively, and this government has a clear mandate to do so.

In terms of the very specific issues we are discussing, which are the number of committees and the scope of operations, Ms Pennicuik covered quite well two of the key issues that the committee structure needs to deal with. One of those issues is that the committee structure is partly there to ensure that we get quality legislation, so the committee structure needs to be able to hold inquiries and consider legislation and do so in a way that it can come up with recommendations for the highest possible quality legislation on what are often very complicated policy matters. In addition, committees are there to hold the executive to account,

such as the PAEC, which was referred to, somewhat ironically, by the previous speaker, given that our highly supported set of reforms are being held up at the moment in an unnecessary committee process.

When we look at the functions of committees we have to ask ourselves: what is the best way of satisfying these functions, of getting quality legislation and of holding the executive and indeed the government and the legislature itself to account? The best way is not necessarily to have more committees. We could have 40 committees and each of us as a one-person committee considering everything we wanted to consider. We could have 80 committees with each of us chairing two different committees if that was something members thought appropriate. Having more committees is not necessarily a question of having more scrutiny. In fact having more committees could mean having less scrutiny because you would be spreading the resources of the Parliament, in terms of both its membership and its parliamentary staff, so thin that nothing would get done.

The change to merge the six committees into three will actually lead us to see more effective scrutiny. It will see a more effective consideration of complex policy matters. We will see that the resources of the chamber will not be stretched unnecessarily. Again let us look at this in the broader context. What we are seeing is the proposal to go from 13 committees to 9 committees. We are not seeing a reduction by 50 per cent in the committee structure per se. We are seeing relatively little structural change across the whole committee system, but in changing these particular six committees down to three what we are seeing is a more rational committee structure in the sense that it will lead to more effective operations.

When the Minister for Education referred to the committees operating more efficiently in his second-reading speech on the bill it was not in a simplistic sense — that reducing the numbers from X to Y means it will become more efficient. That is not what he was referring to at all. When you have a more appropriate number, more is not necessarily better, and less is not necessarily better. What you want is the optimal number. I believe that what the minister was referring to was that when you get to the optimal number you are more efficient because you have a better and more effective resourcing allocation.

I totally agree with Mr Drum's comments that we need a committee structure which can roam widely across the policy landscape and that the committee structure needs to be resourced in such a way that rural and regional issues can be covered. However, if this

committee structure is put in place, it will be able to do that. If we go down the path contained in the bill, another thing that will strengthen the committee system, not weaken it, is that not only will we have stronger resourcing of each committee but it will also better reflect the whole-of-government perspective of many policy issues and indeed the interdependency of many policy issues.

For example, when the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee merges with the Education and Training Committee we will see a committee that can do a much better job of reflecting the interrelated nature of the education and training issues and challenges and economic development. Those two issues are highly related, and there will be many instances where reviews need to touch on both of those areas. It is better for the Parliament, both in terms of the parliamentary members who are on those committees and also in terms of the secretariat supporting it, for that committee to be able to have expertise in both of those areas.

Having been an adviser in other parliaments, I speak from experience when I say that there are many instances when in order to function well committees often have members of Parliament sitting in as guests or observers. That reflects the fact that more often than not when you spread yourself too thin you need to bring in expertise, and that can work in a very ad hoc and ineffective way. These new committees will reflect the interdependencies of many highly related policy areas. When the Environment and Natural Resources Committee merges with the Rural and Regional Committee those two policy areas will be more closely related. Again, that will strengthen that committee because so many issues in relation to the environment and natural resources obviously have an impact in rural and regional areas. There are going to be so many inquiries where that committee's work will be strengthened by having members of Parliament and members of the secretariat who have expertise in both areas.

I stress that as far as I am concerned, and I believe as far as the government is concerned, this bill is not about efficiency in some kind of simplistic sense — that is, that reducing committees means there will be the same output from less committees. It is about improving the effectiveness of our committees and strengthening the system. It is about getting higher quality reports and higher quality consideration of legislation, and it will see all of the core functions of the legislature performed to a higher standard given the resources that we have.

All of us in this chamber probably agree it is a worry that the legislature — here and in many places in Australia and around the world — is being challenged in the community and in the media. We need to do everything we possibly can to strengthen its reputation. That would be a good thing not just for the legislature but for our society. The suite of reforms we took to the election — which included things like removing Dorothy Dixers, strengthening the powers of the Presiding Officers and revamping the committee structure — will be very effective. That is why we should support this bill and also the broader set of reforms this government is putting to this chamber.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate this afternoon on the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015. I support the position of the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips in that the opposition will be opposing this bill this afternoon. Having said that, however, I do support the provisions in relation to the Inquiries Act 2014.

It is interesting that Mr Mulino made a contribution to this debate, as he has never sat on a joint parliamentary committee in this Parliament. I see Ms Shing is lining up to speak as well, and I do not believe she has sat on a joint parliamentary committee either. I enjoyed Mr Mulino's contribution, but only because some advice has obviously been provided to him about what inefficiencies or otherwise there have been in the conduct of the joint parliamentary committees in preceding Parliaments. Unless you are on a committee you cannot have a real appreciation of the work it does or the outcomes it achieves.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — Ms Shing can argue that point; her turn will come very shortly. I look forward to her contribution; she is another member of the government who has not sat on one of these committees. But I am happy to hear her expound, with her vast experience and knowledge, on the inefficiency of these committees in the past and how much more efficient they will be under an Andrews government. We have seen evidence of how efficient the Andrews government is going to be from its first 100 days, during which we have endured a talkfest — reviews, maybes and pieces of legislation that trickle through this house and will all go back into committee because they have not been properly authored.

We are here today to talk about the important role of these committees. I appreciate that all speakers have acknowledged the role of the committees — joint and

upper house committees — in relation to policy setting and introducing legislation. It is a sad fact that in 100-plus days of this government there has only been one joint parliamentary committee conducting an inquiry, as far as I know. I sit on the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which is undertaking the Fiskville inquiry. Before Ms Shing jumps up and says the Andrews government committed to that inquiry, let me say that that is true, and the committee is conducting that inquiry as I speak. That is the only one in 100-plus days that has been constituted and is actually undertaking an inquiry, which is quite a time lag and hardly represents the interests of Victoria. There is not one upper house committee functioning at the moment.

I was very pleased when the former Premier, Ted Baillieu, asked me to chair the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, a joint parliamentary committee, which I did over the four-year term. We conducted over five inquiries in that time, and I am pleased to say that much of that work is still being reviewed and referred to in the drugs and crime prevention area. We took on law reform as part of the reform process Mr Mulino talked so much about when he was talking about how these committees might work more efficiently. That reform process goes on all the time.

The bill we are debating today is not part of a reform process. This is the consolidation of a number of committees into large entities that will not have the capacity or resources to conduct simultaneous inquiries. The government is bundling together so many different subject areas that there is no way committees can be properly resourced to do so. For Mr Mulino's benefit, many of the committees did conduct inquiries simultaneously and drew on significant resources from the Department of Parliamentary Services to support them. While the government presumably believes consolidating committees will save some money and make them more efficient, it could well have the opposite effect, causing them to draw on more resources and leaving them unable to do the detailed work that is required of them.

In the past the joint parliamentary committees have had a very good reputation. Under the last government a number of committees conducted very important inquiries, and we continue to see the benefits of that work, with legislation addressing some of their recommendations still going through the Parliament. I had a strong association with the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, which will now be the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee. Drugs and crime prevention have been

taken out, but the judiciary and a few other things have been snuck in, covering a huge range of subjects that will drain that committee's resources.

The committee I want to refer to and whose work I am familiar with is the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, in a similar way to Mr Drum, who said he was very familiar with the work of the committees he was involved in in relation to regional Victoria. For whatever reason, Labor does not seem to like regional Victoria. It does not even like the word 'regional'. It has tried to scrub it from wherever it is written in any of the legal entities of the government of the day. The government does not want to use the word 'regional' in describing the Regional Growth Fund. It does not even want to use the \$1 billion that was put into the fund. It does not want to use the Putting Locals First Fund, and it wants to cut the country roads and bridges program. The government hates the country. It hates farmers, and it hates regional Victoria. But I digress.

The work of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee on the inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines, which I want to acknowledge, was 10 months in the making. Some 222 witnesses were interviewed, there were 113 public hearings and 79 submissions were made. It covered the whole of regional Victoria, canvassing the views of communities on drug use and the abuse of crystal meth, or ice, as we know it. That work was condensed into a 32-chapter, 1000-page report and was delivered to the Parliament on time, on 3 September. I apologise to Mr Leane, as I know he knows all this. I might say that Mr Leane made a very valuable contribution to the committee in his time as a participating, bipartisan member.

What really disappointed me was that despite all that work and the 54 important recommendations, the government chose to ignore it. It said, 'I'll tell you what. We'll have a 100-day talkfest about how best to address the issues around the increased use and abuse of crystal meth'. The government did the do-nothing thing for 107 days in relation to a significant social and health problem in regional Victoria, in particular in relation to drug abuse. Then at the very last moment, when it was required under legislation to table a response, the government did not even refer to the recommendations. It referred sublimely to the report itself and then referred to the task force, which will replicate and duplicate some of the work the committee has already done. It also made funding announcements attached to some of the recommendations that were foreshadowed in that report and presumably reannounced through the task force.

When we talk about efficiency, the example the government has demonstrated in replicating some of the work of the committee and wasting time to the detriment of the community of Victoria in relation to drug and drug abuse is disgraceful. I can think of harsher terms, but I now acknowledge that some of the terminology I used yesterday was unparliamentary. I will refrain from using those terms, but I will say that I am extremely disappointed at the government's approach to that very important report, its recommendations and its required response, which was to not even refer to the recommendations. The biggest losers are those in the Victorian community.

The point of all that was to say it was a very efficient committee that had good, strong bipartisan support, and it delivered a good report. The government had ample opportunity to respond to the recommendations and introduce some very strong legislation that would respond immediately and urgently to the supply issues around ice, and also to the prevention, harm reduction and rehabilitation issues associated with those who are addicted to using the drug as opposed to those who are trafficking the drug. To this very day, even though I have been out there over the last 48 hours trumpeting the fact that the government has not responded to this report in an appropriate manner under the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and that it is sadly letting Victoria down, the Premier has yet to make a response or say that the government will respond to the recommendations that were put before the Parliament.

The Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which is another committee that will be consolidated under the government's proposals, is presently conducting an inquiry into the Country Fire Authority training facility at Fiskville. It may have to conduct another inquiry and yet another inquiry while that inquiry is going on. It has just two staff to resource a committee that might be undertaking multiple inquiries. I can assure members that that will not serve the credibility and validity of the committee's work, including that of the participating members, in the way that a well-resourced committee that has a defined charter in relation to its terms of reference would do for the community of Victoria. I truly do not believe that just consolidating a number of committees to save money will create any greater efficiency in most cases. It might in some, but it certainly will not provide the sort of detailed report that has a reputation for credibility and validity that is well recognised because of the committee structure and the capacity for committees to do that work and draw on external experience.

There are a couple of issues I want to draw to the attention of the chamber. One is that it has been some 107 days since the Andrews government was elected and none of the committees are functioning. In fact all of them bar one that I am aware of have not been legislated through the Parliament, yet here we are spending time talking about the consolidation of committees and possible chairs of committees, with a May budget looming. The committee of scrutiny on government expenditure — the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — has not even been constituted as a recognised joint parliamentary committee. Time's a wastin', I might say, in having this discussion about another government just wanting to impose its footprint on a structure that has been found to be reasonably productive, efficient and useful, certainly by the quantity and quality of the reports that have been prepared over the previous term of government.

We should not make change for change's sake, yet that seems to be the strategy of this government at the moment. It seems that any change is a good change because it looks like the government is doing something. To my mind, that mantra is not going to produce the sort of efficiency and productivity that the Victorian public would believe to be the case. On that basis, even though I understand there are opportunities for reform — and I could give members a book of reforms that I believe this place and the other place could make to create greater efficiency — I will have that opportunity at a later time, whether it is through the Procedure Committee or elsewhere. A lot of time is wasted in this place and in the other place and we could have significant reforms. However, I believe the government has made a grave mistake by consolidating joint parliamentary committees, because it will create problems with resources and the credibility of reports that are the result of the inquiry work that occurs in those committees —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Time, Mr Ramsay!

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise in support of the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015 and to address some of the matters raised by Mr Ramsay in his extraordinarily illuminating contribution to the house, which immediately preceded the opportunity I now have to get on my feet.

At the outset I note that Mr Ramsay has called into question the capacity of new members in this place to express any view in relation to the consolidation of committees from six into three, as set out in the content of this bill. He has indicated that, ostensibly because of

his own vast experience in parliamentary committees over a number of years, he is somehow better equipped to comment on the structure and processes involved in committee deliberations of subject matter.

To that end I would invite Mr Ramsay, and in fact anyone else who is tempted to adopt this very trite line of logic and reasoning, to bear in mind that things can always be improved, that we are all learning and that the opportunity to learn and improve should never be passed by, particularly when it comes to a more efficient, more effective and more responsible and appropriate means of effecting public administration.

The irony of hearing the contributions of those opposite today has not been lost on me, and it has not been lost on my peers or on the Andrews government in relation to calls — catcalls, if you will — that we have allegedly wasted time by failing to effect the parliamentary committee structure that will enable the subject matter set out in the current six-committee structure to be commenced and that, save for the one committee which is currently in train and addressing the scope of its inquiry, we are yet to see any significant groundwork to establish the other committees. This is breathtaking.

Mr Ramsay — Breathtaking! Take a deep breath.

Ms SHING — It is breathtaking in respect of inaccuracy and a grossly irresponsible bending of the truth to the convenience of those opposite. Despite the opposition's vast experience, as Mr Ramsay outlined in his contribution — which has now concluded, and for that I must confirm I am grateful — it claims that there is nothing further to be gained by change or reform and that there is nothing further to be learnt from effecting change to make public administration a more streamlined, efficient and, most importantly, effective tool of government so that a specific subject matter which is passed on to a committee for consideration, deliberation and recommendation is dealt with with the care and attention it deserves and warrants.

In administering the use of taxpayer funds and the use of parliamentarians' time to address the significant issues, which are in the public interest, I note that no member, at least to my recollection, has called into question the relevance of and the need for parliamentary committees. Nobody has called into question the relevance of and the need for efficiency, transparency and accountability in the course of public administration.

However, what we have from those opposite is a tactical attempt to refuse to reform sessional orders, to refuse to reform, streamline and make more efficient

the committee structure and to refuse to engage in a process which will enable efficiencies to be gained and duplication to be identified and, wherever possible, removed in dealing with subject matters that have common ground or at least common circumstance binding them. We see the opposition wedded to this idea — this intractable, knee-locked position — that it could not possibly countenance any of the changes proposed by this bill because what has been in place previously has been good enough.

That is somewhat counterintuitive because we have also heard contributions from those opposite today that the committee structure has also — I believe Mrs Peulich may have made this contribution — been vulnerable to what I think Mrs Peulich referred to as stacking and politicisation. I am happy to be corrected if that is not what *Hansard* has recorded; however, it is my recollection. We have an opposition that on the one hand is deadset on the idea of these committees being as necessary, important, relevant and appropriate as they are within the structure of effective public administration, yet on the other hand is saying that the committee structure is vulnerable to a political process which means that their ends are not always entirely or clearly defined as something which has been arrived at for proper purposes related only to the subject matter at hand.

The bill seeks to effect a streamlining. It seeks to merge the six joint investigatory committees into three new committees. It is common sense that the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee be merged with the Education and Training Committee to create the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee. This committee is proposed to inquire into matters relating to economic development, education and jobs. As we have seen from the farcical attempts by those opposite in question time to merge subject matter and then to complain about the inappropriate allocation of questions to ministers who cannot comment as the responsible minister because they do not have entire control of the subject matter, we do not live in a vacuum. On that basis minimising duplication is an appropriate and common-sense approach to take.

The second proposed new committee would comprise the Environment and Natural Resources Committee merging, as we would propose it to, with the Rural and Regional Committee to create a new Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee. To that end I take up Mr Ramsay's point from his earlier contribution — his wise and erudite and incredibly experienced contribution to my novice-like ears. Again, I am blessed to have the wisdom he has

brought to this place today in respect of his many decades, or a couple of years, of experience on committees.

Mr Ramsay — On a point of order, Acting President, I have probably listened as long as I want to to Ms Shing's reflection on my contribution. The sarcastic wit in which she is referencing my contribution is totally unparliamentary, and I ask that if she has some substantial contribution to make, she perhaps make it without referencing my own contribution or me.

Ms SHING — On the point of order, Acting President, I am responding to a number of references that Mr Ramsay made in his contribution in relation to me and my alleged inexperience because I have not sat on a parliamentary committee. It is very difficult when Mr Ramsay begins a haranguing process without me being in a position to respond to it, thus opening the door to this sort of discourse.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! I ask Ms Shing to go back to the debate at hand rather than entering into a cross-chamber debate with Mr Ramsay.

Ms SHING — Thank you, Acting President. I hope the same courtesy is extended to other speakers in relation to their ability to make their contributions without their relative, or alleged, lack of experience being called into question.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms SHING — I asked for consideration to be given. Mr Ramsay might want to reflect on *Hansard*.

Finally, the contribution made in relation to the regions and the assertion that the Andrews government does not care about the regions and that this is evidenced through the proposed merger of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee with the Rural and Regional Committee on the basis that the government has no interest in doing the right thing by the regions is, quite frankly, an affront. The Andrews Labor government has already, in just over 100 days, made significant inroads into an area of the state that over the last four years has been subjected to a dilapidated, neglected, tired and apparently indifferent approach by the former government to policymaking, and this will provide it with an economic benefit and a long-term plan.

The third component proposed by this bill is the merging of the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee with the Road Safety Committee

to create a new Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to inquire into matters relating to law reform, drug use, crime and road safety. Again, we do not live in a vacuum. There is significant overlap and merging of the subject matters proposed by this merged committee, as there is with the other two examples of committees I alluded to earlier.

The merging of these committees is efficient, effective and appropriate, and it is a hallmark of responsible public administration. It is — not to do a disservice to fairytales around the world — akin to a Goldilocks approach to public administration. It is not too much, and it is not too little in terms of workload, subject matter, minimising duplication and improving efficiency. It is, to our mind, just right. It is just right because it will enable parliamentarians who sit in this place to participate in committees and to gather the broadest possible range of experience and knowledge from what is put before them in those committees to assist them in making reports, recommendations and suggestions that aid a holistic attempt to be a good government and to deliver better outcomes for people who are directly or indirectly affected by various matters under committee consideration.

It is time for us to start being appropriate in the way in which decisions that affect efficiency are taken in this place. Sessional orders deserve to be streamlined. Efficiencies should be delivered. We are attempting, we have attempted and we will continue to attempt to deliver on reforms that streamline public administration and enable Victorians and public administrators throughout the state to get on with it. What we see in this place is the argumentative equivalent — the rhetorical equivalent — of red tape and tactical refusal. We see various components of this place and this chamber refusing to come to the table in the name of cooperation, collaboration, output and hard work.

To that end, I commend the bill to the house and I urge members opposite to consider the benefits that will flow from a consolidated committee structure. I look forward to learning as much as I possibly can in the course of participation in parliamentary committees and inquiries. I look forward to making my own contribution, and I look forward to hearing the contributions of those around me which are based on their own broad experiences gained not from living in a vacuum but through having expertise across a range of different subject matters. It is in essence a microcosm. It is a terrarium of the broader community standards and expectations on decision-making, on policy formation, on recommendations and on a progressive community that I believe we owe to all Victorians in

the proper administration of government and public policy.

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to follow Ms Shing, who made a contribution that was a bit more entertaining than the previous one, which was about fonts and commas. I am pleased to speak on the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015, and I note the contributions made by previous speakers. In particular I note the previous two speakers, who alluded to some of their experiences — some short and some long. I think I am one of the few members in this chamber who has been here for a while — since 2002, during the Bracks administration — and I seem to recall that the committee processes and structures were fairly active under the former Labor government in that period. In fact I was a member of the Law Reform Committee in my early years in this place and I was then a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee from 2006 to 2010.

I refer to that experience in the context of the debate on this bill because there has been much debate about experience, and Mr Ramsay in particular has talked about experience. He has experience and understanding of committees because he has participated in them and run them. The process of running committees is different from what the government is proposing with the amalgamation process. It is trying to load up as few committees as it can with as many inquiries as it can and then flood them with money or otherwise.

The committee process needs to ensure that if an inquiry is undertaken, that committee then has the capacity to undertake the review. I note the Minister for Training and Skills has arrived in the chamber. He also would have a significant understanding of the committee process as a result of his experience in the other chamber and now in this chamber.

The notion that having fewer committees will mean having more efficient committees takes away from the role that committees play and the way they operate in a broader sense. I note we now have crossbenchers in this chamber and more left-leaning members in the other place — that is, the Greens, for those who did not make the link — but I point out that despite the rigour of debate in the chambers where exchanges between people can get heated over different views and policy positions, it is often in those committee processes where the real work occurs.

I know a lot of legislation has been brought forward as a result of the work that committees have done, even over a period of time. I cite, for example, the review

that the former Law Reform Committee conducted, which continued from the previous term of government, in relation to DNA. A significant amount of work was done on the DNA area. The legislation on that matter still flows through; it is quite amazing that reforms still continue and legislation still flows from that inquiry. The Law Reform Committee also reviewed the Coroners Act 1985. I raise that matter because even in the last term of the coalition government amendments to that act and associated legislation were still flowing from that review.

What I am saying is that unless there is capacity to undertake detailed work — in other words, unless there is intent on the part of the members involved — then the processes get lost in the large amount of work that the committees need to do.

In terms of reducing the number of committees from, say, six to three by joining up a significant number of successor committees, as outlined in the table on page 7 of the bill, there will be a significant number of areas where the committees will be undertaking — I gather this is what the government intends to happen — three or four inquiries at once. While that might sound easy, those of us who have had the experience of working on some complex inquiries know it takes a lot of work.

Having been the chair of a committee — albeit the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — in the previous government, I know, as do other members of the opposition who have chaired committees under the previous government, that it is a very difficult role to undertake. The role of chair is substantially different from that of a committee member. The chair's role is obviously to ensure that the progression reports and final reports — that is, the reports that are subsequently tabled in Parliament — are accurate, and therefore they need to be read through in detail. There is an enormous amount of work involved.

The work of committees is also about working together. As I was trying to allude to earlier, the idea of rigorous debate occurring across the chamber is one thing, but the capacity for members to work together on legislation in a committee setting, where policy ideas can be formulated for the good of the broader community, is where the work happens. People often say there is rigorous debate in Parliament and that what we see in question time is the nature of what Parliament is about. I can say it is a part of the process, but most of the work — I must say, probably 90-plus per cent of the work — occurs behind the scenes. A lot of that work occurs in the committee setting.

I think it is fair to say that the committee processes need to allow for that engagement and proper and rigorous debate. Even in the committee setting there is not always agreement; minority reports are produced and so on, which often result from the politics around the committee process. But when you go to the Parliamentary library you will see that ultimately most of the committee work that has been done under previous administrations — under the Bracks and Brumby administration and under the administrations before them — was very narrow, in the sense that committees were able to target specific areas and specific issues that the community, the Parliament or indeed the government of the day wished to have pursued.

I raise that matter in response to the notion that super committees are the way of the future. I would argue otherwise. The argument put is that the new system will provide greater capacity for members to become involved. You do not have to be a member of every committee. You may have an interest in one or two committees, and you may wish to pursue those areas of interest, and the same applies to select committees.

I was fortunate to have been involved in the procedural process looking at the way select committees were formed, exploring how such committees operate in the Senate in Canberra and in the New South Wales Parliament and then seeing the same kinds of structures applied in the Victoria Parliament. Again, the financial and budget issues will always be of concern. I think it is fair to say that some work has come out of those select committees that has been of importance not only to this chamber but also to the Victorian community.

I will just touch on another point — a mere note. Often committees provide opportunities for members, including new members and other members looking to move into a further role — members who wish, for example, to undertake a parliamentary secretary position or indeed move into a ministerial role. For such members it is often good — and I have been through that process — to have at least undertaken a role as a chair of a committee. The role of the chair of a committee is to negotiate and work with crossbenchers, the opposition and the government, and that experience comes to the fore in a more senior role.

Members would find that the vast majority of ministers in the current government or in previous governments have had a significant role at some level in committee processes. I do not think the new members opposite quite understand how the committee structure links in with roles they may end up getting, such as being a parliamentary secretary or a minister, or understand that

a change to that structure restricts their capacity to understand how government runs.

Having only a small number of committee chair roles diminishes the opportunities and capacity of members opposite who are new to the chamber to become a chair of a committee and to receive all the benefits or otherwise that might consequently come their way. These benefits are not necessarily financial. They are about understanding government processes, and they are also about working, as I said, with members who are not necessarily on your side of the chamber. That is sadly lacking. I would have thought that some of the more erudite backbenchers — self-proclaimed, perhaps, and some in this chamber more than others — might indicate that it would have been good for them to have been in a chair role, from which they could have received not only experience but perhaps also some reward for the effort. That is a loss to be incurred as a result of this legislation.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — It is not about the money; I said that. It is, however, also about the experience. When we as a Parliament, whether because of decisions of the government or the opposition, diminish the capacity of new members to get involved in the committee process — this is what I am getting at — their understanding when they move into a more senior role, be it that of parliamentary secretary, minister or other senior role, is diminished. I say that with the greatest respect, having been a committee chair and having been on the Law Reform Committee and on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC).

PAEC is a different beast, in the sense that it has a more rigorous environment; the budget process makes it so. The engagement that occurs post budget is very public. Even when the then member for Burwood in the Assembly, Bob Stensholt, was chair of PAEC, I have to say that on occasions when he was chairing — and I say this without meaning to verbal him — he experienced some terse and tense moments when then-government ministers, including the Premier, appeared to slap him down.

Ms Shing — Robust exchanges.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — They were. They were very robust. As I said, PAEC is an opportunity. I am disappointed we have not got PAEC operating. SARC is up and running, with Lizzie Blandthorn, the member for Pascoe Vale from the other place, as chair and me as deputy. We are moving ahead with the process, but I am surprised that PAEC is not, given the budget

processes. PAEC is not only concerned with the budget. PAEC has done a lot of work. I recall we did a lot of work in terms of some of the regulatory reforms that are in place now. They came about as a result of the bipartisan work done by PAEC members across the chamber who include, I must say, Ms Pennicuik. The Greens, however, have now gone AWOL; who knows what committees they are on? They are not on SARC, and they do not know if they are going to be on PAEC. They have probably got other things to attend to.

Mr Ondarchie — They are on something.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — They are probably on something else. That, however, is the Greens, and we wish them well in whatever future may arrive for them. I can say though that the committee process is very important. It is important that this bill be reviewed in terms of the benefits or otherwise of having fewer committees. Obviously there is a process that needs to be undertaken in terms of where PAEC is at. PAEC is not even in this bill in terms of the committees the bill addresses. It is disappointing that PAEC has not been fired up. The role of committees is to scrutinise, and it could be argued that perhaps the government not only wishes to diminish the capacity of its new members to understand the processes of government by not allowing them the opportunities to undertake these roles but also that it may be dismissing them as being irrelevant by not giving them any function or capacity. That is disappointing, because a lot of them think they are very good.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — In following Mr Dalla-Riva, I remark that whilst I do not agree with his end point, I think he made some very good assessments of the committee system and where it has contained a number of advantages. I have to acknowledge and agree with a lot of how he saw the committee process and the work of the committees. In terms of the argument that the quantity is the important thing when it comes to the committees rather than quality, however, I, along with other opposition speakers on this bill, argue the quality of the committees, the work they do and the references they are given is the most important aspect.

The good news for the opposition is that while the bill prescribes a reduction from six to three in the number of joint investigatory committees, the upper house committees will function as worthwhile committees that are able to serve this Parliament well, which compares with what happened with the upper house committees in recent years.

In the last half at least of the last parliamentary term, only one upper house committee would be functioning. The other two would not be operating. The government of the day made sure that one committee had a reference so that at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday nights this chamber would collapse under the guise of that committee meeting. Nothing points to that more than the last reference that David Davis, in his position as health minister, gave to an upper house committee of which I was a member. The reference on community pharmacies was quite confusing, and it was hard to get your head around what the then minister wanted the committee to deliver in the report, because the whole premise of giving the committee that reference was just to keep one committee busy. With the committee active, at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday nights this chamber would collapse. The unfortunate members of that committee would have to meet, and everyone else in this chamber would go to other duties, whether they be at home or elsewhere.

At the end of the last parliamentary term we did not have all three upper house committees functioning at one time. At the end of that term we did not have references that we considered particularly worthwhile. Over the period of that term, despite many attempts, non-government MPs were pretty much unsuccessful in giving those committees a reference or a piece of legislation to consider, which is what those committees were originally set up to do. That is recent history. During the term of the Napthine government there were 21 government MLCs and 19 non-government MLCs, so the 21-19 rule was the reality. That is politics and the way this chamber works.

Members should have no fear about the proposed changes, because even if the new government wanted the upper house committees not to operate in the fashion that they were set up to operate — which is not the government's desire — given the nature of the make-up of the chamber, that decision has been taken out of the government's hands. I will be disappointed if the non-government MLCs do not utilise their numbers in this chamber to refer legislation and meaty references to the upper house committees. I will be disappointed if the non-government members do not ensure that all three of those committees are kept constantly busy looking into issues that are important to the state of Victoria. The scenario in the last term was that it was a particular committee's turn to consider a reference while the other two committees had a break. Once the work on that reference was done, it was another committee's turn to be given a reference and the other two committees had the break. That was the situation we found ourselves in.

If the concern of opposition members is that the reduction in the number of joint committees from six to three will reduce the number of functioning committees, the good news is that there will be six functioning committees because the upper house committees will all be functioning. There was no concern about them not functioning last term, but this term they will be functioning. Members should have no fear about this legislation, because there will be six functioning committees.

I accept the arguments around the importance of functioning committees. I wonder about some of the arguments about consolidating the committees. One was that it would reduce the capacity for committee members to travel overseas to consider different aspects of a reference firsthand in other jurisdictions. Sometimes those jurisdictions are in Europe or America. I might be a bit unpopular in saying this, but I sometimes wonder whether — given that in the world we live in, with the international web, we have at our fingertips information from all around the world — that travel needs to be undertaken as much as it is. I accept that seeing things firsthand is a completely different experience.

If it is the case that committee members need to see things firsthand in another jurisdiction, what issue is there with members of a consolidated committee looking at matters covering two or three references while they are in another jurisdiction? I would have thought that that would be a very efficient way of utilising a committee trip. If members of a joint investigatory committee made up of crossbenchers and opposition and government MPs are to travel halfway around the world, why should they not look at matters covering three different references? I cannot see any issue with that.

The argument that this particular piece of legislation reflects a dumbing down of the Parliament is far from true. As I said, it is more about quality than —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! If Mr Davis and other members could keep the noise level down slightly, it would be most appreciated.

Mr LEANE — Thank you, Acting President. I must say that I have found Mr Davis quite distracting during my contribution, and I appreciate that you have pulled him up.

The argument that this legislation will dumb down the Parliament does not wash. It is about quality. As I mentioned, in the last term some ministers were

notorious for handing over references just to waste the time of committees. The main issue is that committees should be given meaty references on issues that are topical and important to Victorians. Spending quality time considering those issues is what the committees are all about.

The committees can do good work and can produce good reports, and most of the reports that are handed down have a lot of recommendations that the government accepts. I am not saying that committee work is not important. I am looking forward to the upper house committee work we will be doing as members of this chamber. There is no doubt that the non-government members will ensure that the government does not waste time with ordinary references that would be just time wasting and that all three upper house committees will be active at any one time, rather than taking turns to ensure the chamber adjourns at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesdays.

We look forward to these committees being formed. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the upper house committees; I am sure I will have no way out of that anyway, considering how many of us are here. I look forward to us producing good reports on meaty subjects which will hopefully help in forming policy and legislation of governments of all persuasions into the future.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — I welcome the Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries Acts Amendment Bill 2015. The bill amends the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and the Inquiries Act 2014. Part 3 of the bill amends the Inquiries Act. The Inquiries Act is a relatively new act. It was a result of implementing the final recommendation of the bushfires royal commission that was commenced under the former Labor government. The recommendation was that the government should establish a legislative framework for inquiries including royal commissions.

The amendments this bill makes to the Inquiries Act are reasonably minor and therefore have probably not received a lot of attention in the debate today; nonetheless they are really important. The first few clauses deal with clarifying the definitions of ‘judicial officer’, ‘member’ and ‘non-judicial member of VCAT’ and clarifying the circumstances in which witnesses who are attending a formal review under the act are entitled to be paid expenses and allowances. Most importantly, clause 16 allows for the continuing operation of royal commissions that were commenced before the commencement of the Inquiries Act. This matter deserves support and some attention because it is

required to put beyond doubt the continuation of royal commissions.

The McClellan Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was established jointly by the commonwealth and state governments by issuing concurrent letters of patent with equivalent terms of references and reporting dates. While it would be possible to simply reconstitute the royal commission under the new Inquiries Act, that may create practical difficulties for the reconstituted royal commission. Any evidence that was coercively obtained under Victorian laws by the original royal commission may need to be returned after the expiry of that royal commission. If so, the reconstituted royal commission may have to obtain the evidence afresh using its coercive powers that are now provided for under the Inquiries Act. That is clearly unsatisfactory. If the house votes down this amending bill, it would be very troublesome. I hope that does not happen.

I move to amendments proposed to the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003. I welcome this part of the bill because it facilitates the continuation of Labor’s commitment since it came to government, which was enshrined in a bill that passed in the upper house this week — that is, getting this state back to work. As we have heard, this bill merges six joint investigatory committees into three. This will impact on the committee I have had the pleasure of sitting on, the Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENRC), on which I am a co-participant with Mr Ramsay over there.

Mr Ramsay — It is the only one that is doing any work.

Ms SYMES — We are working hard, Mr Ramsay. I was very proud to have been appointed to the committee, and I welcome the incorporation into the committee of the Rural and Regional Committee. ENRC already has a very rural and regional focus. Its current inquiry is in relation to the Fiskville Country Fire Authority (CFA) training facility. This is of strong interest to country communities, including people who live in the Northern Victoria Region, and it is important to career and volunteer CFA firefighters and their families.

My experience of the committee process has been positive. There are three Labor members, two Liberal members and a member of The Nationals on ENRC. In Parliament there are not a lot of opportunities to form a rapport with members from other parties, but the committee system enables you to do that. I look forward to my work and developing a rapport with

members from the other side as we continue our work on ENRC. Despite the important work of committees, I do not think it is the best use of the time of a member of Parliament to be in committee meetings in Melbourne at the expense of doing important work with and for the constituents of their electorate. It is particularly hard for upper house country members to facilitate the needs of their constituencies if they are always required to be in a meeting room in Parliament House. I do not want committee work to be my main source of getting out and listening to my electorate; I want balance, and therefore I support this bill.

The bill proposes two additional committees: the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, which will undertake the functions of the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee and the Education and Training Committee; and the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee, which will undertake the work of the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee and the Road Safety Committee.

I look forward to seeing the more efficient running of parliamentary committees through this consolidation. There is nothing lazy about this proposal. There is no intention to be less accountable or to avoid scrutiny. The change in committee status as proposed will see stronger resourcing of committees, which will see them functioning to the best of their abilities.

Whilst the names of committees are a focus, it is the references that are important to Victorians. I do not think anyone in the community could name the committee that produced the *Betrayal of Trust* report or knows the name of my committee, which is undertaking the Fiskville inquiry. I can understand that people are adverse to change, but this is a new Parliament with new membership, and it is appropriate that we have a new parliamentary committee system that best complements the 58th Parliament. I commend the bill to the house.

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

Debate adjourned until later this day.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 24 February; motion of Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am glad Mr Davis is not here to distract me as I make this contribution. The address-in-reply to the Governor's speech marks the start of a new Parliament and incorporates the government's agenda for the new term.

If I may, I will briefly reflect on the previous term of Parliament and pay tribute to my colleagues and some of the other members who served in this chamber during that term of Parliament. In particular I pay tribute to Brian Tee, whom I worked with closely as an ally in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. I became a great friend of Mr Tee's and was a particular admirer of his policy work and his work in other areas, and it is a shame that we cannot continue that collaboration. I also pay tribute to Lee Tarlamis, who also just missed making the cut in his region. Lee Tarlamis was a great person to work with. He was a very intelligent man who put a lot of thought and effort into representing his electorate. I worked with him when I was Opposition Whip, and I will miss seeing him in this chamber, but as with Mr Tee, he has not gone off to heaven. They are both still around, and I will see them a lot.

I also pay tribute to a member of the previous opposition, Johan Scheffer, who retired at the last election. Mr Scheffer was and is a remarkable person. I got to know Mr Scheffer well when I was on the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee with him as well as through other means. Mr Scheffer was and is one of the smartest human beings I have come across. Like his colleagues, he has not gone to heaven and I will enjoy catching up with him in the future.

I pay tribute to government members in the previous Parliament. Peter Hall was a member of this chamber who left before the end of the term, and I never had a chance to pay tribute to him. Even though I was on the opposite side to him I found it impossible to dislike Peter Hall; I disliked the fact that it was impossible to dislike Peter Hall — that is the sort of person he was. I pay tribute to David O'Brien and Andrew Elsbury, who contested their seats but were unsuccessful. I admire them both because they were passionate players in this chamber. I bumped heads with, in particular, Mr Elsbury a number of times — and quite hard. There is a lot we would probably not agree on, but I admire

anyone who has the passion of their convictions to the degree that Mr Elsbury had.

Moving onto this term of Parliament, the address-in-reply is an opportunity for new members to make their first speech to the Parliament. I start by commending the first speeches of my colleagues in the government Ms Symes, Ms Shing, Mr Dalidakis and Mr Mulino — whose name is spelt differently to the Merlino I have been used to. I am very happy to be working alongside all of them.

In terms of the new members of the chamber, I know we are all very excited about the talent they bring, regardless of the side of the chamber they are on and including new members from the Liberal-Nationals coalition. It is important that new talented people come into this place. We will all be leaving this place, though some of us might not want to. It is exciting for the Parliament when new talent comes in. I am absolutely delighted with the four new members who are my colleagues, and I am in awe of their talent and their willingness to work. We appreciate that, particularly as government members in the Council, because there are now only 14 of us out of 40 members, so their work helps quite a bit.

I wish to pay tribute to the new Greens MLCs. I really enjoyed the first contributions that they gave, though it seems like that was a year ago. I enjoyed their first speeches, and I particularly look forward to working with them. Ms Dunn and I will be sharing an electorate. We will be butting heads at times, but I am sure we will find a lot of things that we have in common.

I also want to highlight the contribution to the address-in-reply debate given by Ms Springle. I am glad that somebody with her experiences was elected to the chamber. She related times when she had no money, had kids to look after and was struggling. The more people who are elected like that, the better. There are probably more people in the Labor Party like that than in the other parties, so while I am being generous maybe I should not be too generous!

I wish to say to the new crossbench MLCs that they are entering an exciting Parliament. I do not think it will be boring. And I did not look at Mr Finn on purpose when I said 'boring', because his contribution is next —

Mr Finn — I am next.

Mr LEANE — You are many things, Mr Finn, but you are not boring. The new crossbenchers bring an exciting element into this chamber, and I am glad that there are different views, different perspectives and different agendas. There are also extremes of opinions,

which is a great thing. We now have different social views and legislative views represented.

People may think that extreme views either way can be a bad thing, but my personal opinion is that if we have a range of perspectives and extreme views in this chamber, after those arguments are debated we will end up somewhere in the middle, and that is reflective of the people we represent. I am not saying that the middle is always the best place to land, because I also have views that would land elsewhere. It is not a bad thing to have people with different views in this chamber, and I look forward to the debates ahead.

I say that because sometimes this place can be a bit insular. We can sometimes get confused, and there are times of the day when you start to think that everything exists within these four walls. The reality is that we have to constantly remind ourselves that we represent the whole state of Victoria. When it comes to legislation and social views and conflicts, as MLCs we represent all of Victoria. That is something we should all keep reminding ourselves of, no matter what side or end of the chamber we are in — wherever we land. We have an important role to play. It is a great privilege to be a member of the Legislative Council. There are only 40 MLCs in the state, and that means it is a great privilege for us. We are privileged outside this chamber in that we are constantly meeting good people and good stakeholders who are doing good things, and we can advocate for them to continue doing good.

There are only 40 of us, and we should keep reminding ourselves of the privileges we have received. Sometimes I forget, and I am happy for people to remind me as well, but the bottom line is that we are in a great position to do good things. I am sure there is a joint goal shared by all of us in this chamber, no matter which side we sit on, that at the end of this term we can look back and know that we have done a lot of good things between us. I look forward to that.

The Governor's speech also covers the incoming government's agenda. It is a big, ambitious agenda, and I know my new government will be judged on the delivery of that. That is only fair, and we accept that. I look forward to all the varied advice we are likely to receive about how we might be able to get that done more efficiently. I am sure there will be a lot of advice around that, but I am looking forward to that as well.

I am looking forward to starting the Melbourne Metro project. We will be judged if we do not start that, and that is fair. That has been the subject of a discussion that has been going on for a long time. If there are not some building sheds, some dirt that has been dug and

some facilitation of that job getting done by the end of this term, then we will be judged on that, and that is fair enough. We have also committed to 50 grade separations over the next two terms, and I am looking forward at the end of the term to a good number of them being done. I am looking forward to a good number of those level crossings being removed and therefore relieving congestion and making a lot of the nearby roads safer. As I said, I am looking forward to working with you all.

Mr Ramsay — You have said that six times already.

Mr LEANE — I think Mr Ramsay gets confused about my generosity. I am looking forward to working with all members in this chamber, and I am sure there will be good outcomes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! I thank Mr Leane for that very generous contribution to the chamber.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I too would like to express my gratitude to Mr Leane, because it has to be said that over the past eight and a bit years one of the delights I have had in this place is following Mr Leane frequently in debate.

Mr Somyurek interjected.

Mr FINN — No, it is true. I have always found that whenever I follow Mr Leane in debate I am never short of anything to say, because even if I do not have the faintest idea of what I was going to say before I make my contribution, by the time Mr Leane has finished I have usually got three or four pages of notes.

Mr Leane — I am here to help.

Mr FINN — Mr Leane is here to help, and he is doing a marvellous job. It is great to see him back in the chamber, and I congratulate him on his new position as parliamentary secretary to — who is it? He does not know and I do not know either, but we congratulate him nonetheless; it is a marvellous thing.

I also want to thank the Governor for his speech and to reassert my loyalty and allegiance to Her Majesty. The overwhelming majority of people throughout the world cannot help but be inspired by the commitment and hard work Her Majesty has put into leading us over such an extraordinarily long period of time. A dwindling number of people in this country believe that we should ditch the monarchy and go to a republic, but the last figures I saw showed that support for Australia becoming a republic is at the lowest number since the

1930s. Those who proclaim that we should be ditching our constitution and ditching our constitutional monarchy are barking up the wrong tree.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! I ask government members to keep their voices down.

Mr FINN — There is a full meeting going on over there. They are doing the numbers, and we will find out tomorrow afternoon exactly what they are doing the numbers for, which could be the highlight of the week. I go back to what I was saying, which is that the republic in this country is dead, so that is something we should celebrate.

As has been highlighted by other members, there have been a few changes around here over the last few months. Those of us on this side of the chamber have shifted sides, and we have also seen Mr Somyurek become a minister of the Crown, and as a good minister of the Crown he has taken to wearing blue ties. That is a marvellous thing. I suspect Mr Somyurek was sick of getting beaten up in question time and he thought wearing a blue tie would give him a free pass.

Mr Somyurek — It didn't happen today.

Mr FINN — Today it actually worked! I suspect Mr Somyurek will be down at Target tomorrow and he will buy out the entire collection.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr FINN — No, he will not be there as small business minister; you can forget about that! He will be down at Target buying out their collection of blue ties, and that is something Target can look forward to.

As I was saying, there have been a few changes around here, and one particular change that I am very proud of is my appointment as shadow parliamentary secretary for autism spectrum disorder. I have held a great deal of interest in this area for many years. It is something that has been ignored for far too long, and it has not been given the attention it deserves. Autism is a growing problem within our community, with an increasing number of children born with autism. Autism occurs across the socioeconomic spectrum; it does not differentiate between people of different races or anything else. It is a mystery to us all.

We do not know what causes autism and we do not know how to cure it, but we can work to help those who are afflicted by autism, and I am not just talking about children and others with autism; I am talking about their families as well. The suffering they go

through can be quite severe at times. I am not just talking about the parents; quite often the grandparents and the siblings of the autistic child are affected in a significant way. I look forward to getting my teeth into my portfolio area. I will be visiting every autism group across the state over the next few months to get their perspective on what we can do in this place to make their lives better.

I am particularly proud that it was the coalition which gave autism spectrum disorder a portfolio area, and to my knowledge that is a first for any party in the world. The announcement of that portfolio very much goes to the vision of the man who made it happen, and that is the new Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Matthew Guy. I have known Matthew for a long time. I like him and he is a friend of mine, but more than that he is somebody who is going to be a great Premier of Victoria. He will be a Premier I can get excited about. He is going to be a Premier who will rejuvenate Victoria, and after four years of Dodgy Dan we are going to need somebody to rejuvenate the place. Victoria is in for a rough few years, but I have no doubt that after 2018 the Guy government will go a long way towards making Victoria a very exciting place to be once more. That is something I am very much looking forward to.

I would like to thank the people of the western suburbs for electing me to represent them in this house for a third term. I am deeply regretful that my colleague Andrew Elsbury is not joining me on this occasion, but I am sure he will remain active in the Liberal Party — in fact I know he is remaining active in the Liberal Party. You just never know where he is going to pop up next, and we will keep an eye out for him.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr FINN — We will keep an eye out for him, Mr Ramsay. Nobody can doubt that.

I want to assure the people of the west that I am totally committed to the western suburbs of Melbourne. I am totally committed to the people of the western suburbs because they are good people. Some of them may be misguided in terms of which way they vote, but they are good and hardworking. They love their families, pay their taxes, pay their mortgages, go to work and do all the things that have made Australia great. I want to pay tribute to those people, whether they be from Werribee, Sunbury, Footscray, Point Cook, Williamstown, Braybrook — where my new office is — or any of those —

Mr Ondarchie — Newport.

Mr FINN — Newport is another one — any of those places that are in the western suburbs. I want to pay tribute to the people in the west because they are the salt of the earth. They are very good people indeed.

Going beyond our shores, I want to make reference today to something that distresses me enormously on a daily basis and has done for some years, and that is the persecution of Christians throughout the world. As recently as an hour ago I was speaking to somebody in Pakistan who told me that the children she looks after in an orphanage had been attacked by an Islamic mob and beaten up. That happened just today. That is one of the milder incidents I have heard about lately, because this is something that is happening right across — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! If members would like to speak, they should keep it down or take their conversations out of the chamber.

Mr FINN — I hope members take note of this because I think it is extremely important. It is something every Australian should be concerned about. What we are seeing across the world is the persecution of Christians on a scale that has not been seen for probably a couple of millennia. It is inconceivable in its evil. We are seeing children being crucified, we are seeing women being raped and sold into sex slavery, we are seeing men being stoned and we are seeing beheadings. We are seeing all manner of savagery inflicted on Christians throughout the world, and that is something Australia needs take a strong stand on. As I have said in this house before, I am very hopeful that Australia will open its doors to Christians who are being persecuted — for example, the Coptic Christians in Egypt and other Christians in that region. They have been the victims of enormous persecution. Many thousands have died.

Islamic State and other scum around the world have set out to deliberately destroy Christianity, worldwide if they can. Australia has a role in standing up for persecuted Christians. We have a role in taking a good number of them in as genuine refugees. Those people we hear screaming about asylum seekers and the evils of the Abbott government policy are never heard talking about the need to take persecuted Christians in to protect them from what is going on. You never hear them talking about the suffering of Christians throughout the world. There is a double standard there and a level of hypocrisy that I find despicable. I suggest to those people that they have a good, hard think about where their priorities should lie. We should be helping those who genuinely need our help, and Christians who are being persecuted — who are being slaughtered in

their thousands in places — need our support. We should open our arms to them.

I have been in this house now for coming up to nine years, and I was in the other place for seven years, so I have been around here for a little while. It is good to have people here like Mr Melhem, for example, who complement this place. They —

Mr Ramsay — Is it?

Mr FINN — It is a delight to have somebody like Mr Melhem here. He brings a totally different perspective to mine. I represent the workers of the west. I do not think I can put the difference politely, but we are talking about a perspective that has perhaps led the workers astray on more than one occasion. I am very aware of the difference of opinion in this chamber, and I think it reflects well on our democracy.

I am hopeful that when this house changes its name to the State Senate, as it will hopefully do in this term, we will be able to tell our story to Victoria, because after 150 years Victorians still do not know what the Legislative Council is. I believe that if we were to change our name to the 'State Senate', we would automatically tell people exactly who we are and what we do. There would be no need to tell the story, although we do have a very good story to tell. It is important, because all the action happens in this chamber. Let us face facts. We should be getting out there and telling the people of Victoria who we are, what we are doing and that we have their interests at heart.

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I am pleased to rise to speak in this debate on the address-in-reply, which is a fairly wideranging, free kind of debate. As members will know, I did not get a chance to make an inaugural speech in coming to this chamber from the other chamber, so I may acknowledge a few things that I would have acknowledged in an inaugural speech as I go through my address-in-reply contribution.

Firstly, I congratulate all the new members of Parliament who are here today. It has been a feisty introduction to this chamber for most people this year. However, all members on all sides of the political spectrum know that they are greatly honoured to be representing the people of Victoria and ensuring that this place delivers good, sound policy that leads to our state prospering and providing a better future for generations of Victorians than exists today.

I have not had a chance to acknowledge that sometimes in a democracy people of great intent and capacity miss

out. Our system is far from perfect. I would like to take this opportunity, because I have not had the opportunity before, to acknowledge those who were not elected last time around, particularly past members Brian Tee and Lee Tarlamis, who made substantial contributions in this chamber during the last parliamentary term, and I acknowledge their contributions. I would also like to mention my very good friend Erik Locke, who was unsuccessful in Southern Metropolitan Region. With no disrespect to those who were successful, Erik is a great loss to our Parliament and our state. He would have made a great contribution to furthering progressive policies in Victoria.

As for me, I am pleased to be contributing to this address-in-reply debate. It is a great honour to be in this chamber and to make my contributions to Victoria, to making Victoria a stronger place and in particular to making the electorate I represent a stronger place, a big electorate though it be. I will talk a little bit about that later.

Many of you will know that I was elected to represent the Assembly electorate of Eltham 12 years ago, and I have made a few address-in-reply speeches — not as many as Mr Finn, I have to acknowledge, who has also made speeches in both houses. There are a few of us now. It is interesting to see the differences between the two chambers. It is a good experience to experience the two. One of the things you find is that there are different perceptions in each chamber of how the other chamber operates — its worth, its value et cetera. Quite frankly those perceptions are quite wrong in most cases, so it is a worthwhile experience being a part of both and gaining a broader understanding of how the Parliament actually works.

I am a city lad. It is a challenge for me to represent a very diverse country electorate. Since I have been elected I have been going around that electorate, which covers nearly half of the state, from Diamond Creek up through Bendigo to Mildura, along the Murray River to Echuca, around to Wodonga and Corryong and taking in Shepparton. It is a great part of Victoria, a part that has considerable needs as well as considerable strengths. Of course it is a part that has representatives of all political persuasions. I am looking forward to continuing that grassroots interaction with the region — with its bustling centres; its strong industries; its tourism areas, like the Ovens Valley; its timber industry; its wine regions, like Heathcote; its rich agricultural production; and the border towns of Wodonga and Echuca — and recognising the vast differences between the different communities.

One of the things that links directly to the Governor's speech is that even though those communities are diverse and different, they all have one thing in common: they all recognise the importance of education, training and skills, both to the people who live in those towns and to their industries and communities. The communities in every town, city and village rely on education, and most of them have a strong reliance on a local TAFE, a community college or a Learn Local that needs government support to grow and flourish and to meet the needs of those communities.

It would be unusual for me not to say in a speech that unfortunately when the Andrews government was elected to government the education system — in particular our TAFEs — was in a very parlous condition. The TAFEs were financially bankrupt. We are seeing the financial audits of 2014, which show that record losses were made across our TAFEs, and that has impacted on their capacity to offer skills training, opportunity and jobs to all those communities right across the region — in fact all across Victoria. One of the strong motivations for me being here as Minister for Training and Skills is to turn that around, to make Victoria a genuine education state and in particular to make our public provision strong, to make our private providers robust in providing quality training, to make our industries more productive because of that skills development and to give people the opportunity they need to get a job. That is pretty important. It is a big task. On this side of the house we take that task incredibly seriously, and we will do it. Be clear: we will do it.

I will not speak for too long on this because it is a kind of halfway-house speech really — between an inaugural speech and an address-in-reply speech. When I look at the massive challenge for Victoria that the Governor covered in his speech and the massive agenda the government has, I think of the people here and the sacrifices they make in political life of time with their families — their children, their wives — the people who would probably benefit from their time. Sometimes I think my family is pleased to get rid of me. But I want to acknowledge here that all too often the burden of a politician's life plays out on their family members. I am certainly far from a perfect husband or dad, and I thank my family for putting up with some of the circumstances when I am not around or when I have not been there to give them the support they needed. I just want to put that on the record.

Mr Dalidakis — I think you would be a ripper dad.

Mr HERBERT — Mr Dalidakis thinks I would be a ripper dad. Maybe. My children are older now, but when I was younger politics certainly played a major part in their lives. I was away a lot, I was involved in Canberra for a fair bit or in late hours at this place, and that takes its toll. I think they were very tolerant young people, to be honest.

I will finish up on that note, except to finally say that Victoria is a great place. It is a place we are really proud of. The Andrews government has a massive agenda in terms of what it wants to achieve in jobs, employment, opportunities for people, services such as health and all sorts of other services that people rely on and families rely on. I am very proud to be part of that government and proud to be part of the rebuilding process of making Victoria a much stronger place to live.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — It looks like I am here to adjourn the debate rather than give an inaugural speech, but I take the opportunity to congratulate Mr Herbert on a wonderful speech as part of the address-in-reply debate in the Legislative Council. I look forward to making some complimentary comments in a contribution I will probably make at another time.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

VETERANS AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time for Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) on motion of Mr Herbert; by leave, ordered to be read second time forthwith.

Statement of compatibility

For Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State), Mr Herbert tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Veterans and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015 (the bill).

In my opinion, the bill, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the

charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The bill makes a number of amendments to various consumer acts to clarify and improve their operation and to correct a number of minor and technical errors.

Human rights issues

Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill

No human rights protected by the charter are relevant to the bill.

Consideration of reasonable and justified limitations under section 7(2)

As no rights protected under the charter are relevant to the bill, it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the charter.

Hon. Gavin Jennings, MLC
Special Minister of State

Second reading

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard* on motion of Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills).

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

In the year that we commemorate the centenary of the Gallipoli landings, it is important that we continue to focus on the wellbeing of the Victorian ex-service community. This bill will make a number of amendments to the Veterans Act 2005 that will make it easier for the trustees of patriotic funds to provide support to veterans and their dependants.

Firstly, the bill will simplify the process for transferring patriotic fund assets to a charity located in another state by enabling the director to approve interstate transfers of up to \$1000 in any six-month period, and the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation to approve interstate transfers of up to \$5000 in any six-month period.

Currently, it is necessary to seek the approval of the Governor in Council for all interstate transfers of patriotic fund assets, regardless of the value of the assets being transferred. This requirement is unnecessarily burdensome, and can cause problems where financial assistance is sought as a matter of urgency.

As a related amendment, the bill will also amend the Veterans Act to clarify that the director, minister or Governor in Council, as appropriate, can validate transfers of patriotic fund assets that were inadvertently made without necessary prior approval.

Secondly, the bill will amend the Veterans Act to give the director, on the written application of a patriotic fund trustee,

a limited power to consent to amendments to the trust deed of that patriotic fund. Many older patriotic fund trust deeds do not contain a power of amendment. However, over time, trustees have changed, or new deeds that use modern language have been adopted, even though there was no power to make these changes. The trustees of these deeds have sought to regularise this situation, but due to the lack of an appropriate facility in the Veterans Act, have been unable to do so.

This amendment will enable patriotic fund trustees to remedy defects in the trust deeds of their funds.

Lastly, the bill will insert a process into the Veterans Act that will enable two or more patriotic funds to amalgamate.

In order to ensure ongoing financial viability, a recent trend has been for adjacent RSL sub-branches (which are incorporated associations, and which administer a patriotic fund or funds) to seek to amalgamate. However, at present, there is no facility under the Veterans Act to enable two or more patriotic funds to amalgamate. This means that these amalgamated sub-branches have been forced to maintain accounts for two separate patriotic funds. This is placing an increased and unnecessary burden on these sub-branches.

The bill will also enhance the powers of the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria ('the director') to take investigation, compliance and enforcement action following breaches of consumer affairs legislation and will generally improve the operation of other acts within the consumer affairs portfolio.

Part 3 of the bill will amend the definition of terms contract in the Sale of Land Act 1962. This act offers specific protections to people who buy and sell property via a 'terms contract'. However, at present, the definition of 'terms contract' does not accurately capture when a terms contract does, and does not, exist.

The amendments in this bill will correct the deficiencies in this definition, which will ensure that the Sale of Land Act provides appropriate protection to those buying and selling property via a terms contract.

Part 4 of the bill makes two amendments to the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012.

Firstly, the bill will amend the debt collection provisions of this act to ensure that actions taken by a credit provider to comply with the National Credit Code will not breach restrictions on prohibited debt collection practices.

Secondly, the bill will amend the director's delegation powers to enable the director's powers under section 126 to obtain information, documents and other evidence to be delegated to either an executive within the meaning of the Public Administration Act 2004 or a public servant with a classification of grade 6 or above. This amendment will enable Consumer Affairs Victoria to continue to undertake compliance and enforcement activities when the director is on leave.

As a related amendment, the bill will also clarify that the director is able to take compliance and enforcement action in relation to breaches of both acts within the consumer affairs portfolio, and also the regulations made under those acts.

Part 5 of the bill will amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to enable Consumer Affairs Victoria to take action against rooming house owners that fail to comply with record-keeping obligations regarding safety checks required to be conducted for rooming houses.

Part 6 of the bill makes a series of technical amendments to the Motor Car Traders Act 1986.

Specifically, the bill will enable a deputy chair of the Motor Car Traders Claims Committee to be appointed. The deputy chair will automatically assume the functions of the chair when the office of the chair is vacant, or the chair is absent. This will replace the current onerous process of requiring the Governor in Council to appoint an acting chair in these circumstances.

The bill will also close a loophole that enables licensed motor car traders to avoid being subject to disciplinary action by cancelling or suspending their licence.

Part 7 of the bill will amend the Co-operatives National Law Application Act 2013 to enable co-operatives to resolve disputes via the Magistrates Court instead of the Supreme Court.

Finally, part 8 of the bill will amend the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 to enable the secretary of an incorporated association to apply for an exemption from the requirement to permit members of the association to inspect that association's register of members. Incorporated associations will be required to show that there are special circumstances as to why the exemption should be granted. Such special circumstances may include where the personal safety of members of the incorporated association is put at risk by having their name and address accessible to other members of the association.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) on motion of Mr Ondarchie.

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 26 March.

LIMITATION OF ACTIONS AMENDMENT (CHILD ABUSE) BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time on motion of Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills); by leave, ordered to be read second time forthwith.

Statement of compatibility

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

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

statement of compatibility with respect to the Limitation of Actions Amendment (Child Abuse) Bill 2015.

In my opinion, the Limitation of Actions Amendment (Child Abuse) Bill 2015, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The bill amends the Limitation of Action Act 1958 (Vic.) by removing all limitation periods for actions for damages founded on the death of or personal injury to a person resulting from child abuse, and by removing the 12-year long stop limitation period for actions under part III of the Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic.) in cases where the wrongful death was caused by child abuse.

The amendments extend to instances of child abuse that occurred at any time, regardless of whether or not those claims were previously barred by a limitation period.

The bill expressly provides that the removal of limitation periods will not affect the court's inherent jurisdiction/powers to control or dismiss proceedings that could undermine the administration of justice.

Human rights issues

Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill

The following charter act rights are relevant to the bill:

the right of children to protection as in his or her best interests — section 17(2);

the right to a fair trial — section 24.

Protection of children (s 17)

Section 17(2) of the charter act provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in his or her best interests and is needed by him or her by reason of the vulnerability of their age.

The bill supports the right of a child to protection under the charter act by removing all limitation periods with respect to actions for child abuse. The reforms remove a significant barrier currently faced by victims in issuing civil proceedings before the expiry of the relevant civil limitation period, and provides victims with an 'as of right' opportunity to seek a remedy for the devastating harms they have suffered.

The bill recognises the deep long-term effects of child abuse, such as the extended amount of time (often several decades) it takes for victims of child abuse to understand the abuse they have suffered and issue proceedings in respect of this abuse.

Furthermore, by extending broadly to both physical and sexual child abuse, regardless of the setting in which the abuse occurred, the reforms acknowledge harmful effects that both forms of abuse, occurring in any context, can have on a child's physical and psychological wellbeing.

Right to a fair trial (s 24)

Section 24 of the charter act provides that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent, impartial court or tribunal after a fair

and public hearing. The purpose of the right to a fair hearing is to ensure the proper administration of justice, and applies to all stages in proceedings and in relation to any Victorian court or tribunal.

The removal of limitation periods with respect to child abuse is relevant to the right to a fair hearing that may be called into question due to a lack of evidence arising from the passage of time. The bill supports this right by providing an express evidentiary protection that the removal of limitation periods does not in any way affect the courts' inherent power to control the exercise of their jurisdiction, including by dismissing or ordering a permanent stay to proceedings where the administration of justice may be compromised. This would include where the lapse of time has a burdensome effect on a defendant that is so serious that a fair trial is not possible. In addition, a court will still be bound to provide a fair hearing of the issues by applying the normal rules of evidence.

Are the relevant charter rights actually limited by the bill?

The rights identified above are not limited.

Is any limit on relevant rights by the bill reasonable and justified under section 7(2)?

N/A

Guidance re use of jurisprudence and previous SOC practice

N/A

The Hon. Steve Herbert, MP
Minister for Training and Skills

Second reading

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard* on motion of Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills).

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Family and Community Development Committee tabled its landmark report *Betrayal of Trust* on 13 November 2013. The report highlighted, among other things, the difficulties that survivors of child abuse face in recovering compensation for the devastating effects of their abuse.

In particular, a major obstacle for survivors is the existence of statutory time limits created by the Limitation of Actions Act 1958. The Limitation of Actions Act establishes time periods within which proceedings for different civil actions must be commenced. If proceedings are brought outside a limitation period, a claimant can be barred from obtaining a remedy.

Betrayal of Trust examined civil limitation periods, and concluded that they were inappropriate for survivors of child abuse, who, due to the injury inflicted upon them by their abusers, often take decades to fully understand and act upon the harm arising from their abuse. Many of the courageous

survivors of abuse that spoke to the Family and Community Development Committee explained the debilitating and confusing effects that child abuse can have on a young child's physical and mental wellbeing, including feelings of shame, embarrassment, and guilt, which continue into adulthood and often result in victims suppressing and concealing their abuse from others for many years.

The ongoing work of the national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse mirrors the findings of *Betrayal of Trust*. The chair of the royal commission, Justice Peter McClellan, has remarked of multiple instances where elderly survivors speaking to the royal commission are revealing their past abuse for the very first time in their lives.

Many survivors therefore find themselves faced with an expired limitation period by the time they are ready to commence legal proceedings, and must place themselves at the mercy of courts even to have their claim heard. In settlement negotiations, too, survivors have told how the prospect of an expired limitation period has been used against them to reduce the settlement amount that is offered.

Betrayal of Trust therefore recommended that child abuse be excluded from the operation of the Limitation of Actions Act. This government has pledged to implement all outstanding recommendations from *Betrayal of Trust*, and the introduction of this bill is an important step in the process of allowing access to justice for survivors of child abuse. It gives effect to the relevant recommendation from *Betrayal of Trust* by completely removing all limitation periods that apply to civil actions for damages founded on child abuse.

In removing limitation periods, the bill draws no distinctions between where or when the abuse occurred. While the current Limitation of Actions Act prescribes a complex and confusing array of limitation periods in relation to child abuse, with different limitation periods applying depending upon the identity of the alleged perpetrator and the time and context of the abuse, the bill is uniform in its operation and treats all child abuse claimants equally and fairly.

Furthermore, the bill will apply to past, as well as future claims of abuse, regardless of whether or not past claims were previously subject to a limitation period. While the bill will not reopen cases that have previously settled or been subject to final judgement, it will allow historical victims of abuse — such as many of those who spoke to the Family and Community Development Committee — the opportunity to have their civil claims heard in court. This will be the case even if those people were previously dissuaded from bringing their claims by the existence of limitation periods.

The definition of 'child abuse' used by the bill is broad, encompassing both the physical and sexual abuse of children, as well as psychological abuse that arises out of instances of physical or sexual abuse. By including physical abuse, as well as sexual abuse, within the scope of the bill, the bill recognises that different forms of abuse do not always occur in isolation, and — as the Family and Community Development Committee and the royal commission have recognised — the short and long-term effects of child physical abuse can be equally devastating as those of child sexual abuse. To avoid doubt, it is also important that the bill recognises psychological abuse that is connected to physical or sexual abuse — such as when a child is 'groomed', is made to feel erroneously complicit in abuse that has occurred,

or is coerced or shamed into covering up abuse. This psychological abuse can cause harms that are often inseparable from the harms caused by physical or sexual abuse.

The bill does not seek to define the exact boundaries of what constitutes ‘abuse’ — a task that is fraught with difficulty and may inadvertently exclude valid claims. Instead, the bill will allow courts to determine whether or not abuse has occurred in accordance with the ordinary meaning and common understanding of the term, informed by sources such as the work of the Family and Community Development Committee and the royal commission.

For example, the royal commission’s working definition of child sexual abuse includes ‘any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards’, while *Betrayal of Trust* found that children in institutional care were subjected to physical abuse that included beatings, canings, being locked inside a room without a blanket, or having their heads forced into their dirty linen if they wet the bed.

The bill also recognises that the effects of child abuse are not always confined to the primary victim of the abuse, but can also extend to the dependants of a victim, who may be unaware for many years that childhood abuse was the cause of the victim’s suffering and death. Accordingly, the bill removes the 12-year ‘long stop’ limitation period where a dependant of a deceased victim of child abuse wishes to bring an action for wrongful death.

In recognising that survivors of child abuse face unique and challenging circumstances, the bill is careful to safeguard the fundamental rights of parties before a court, including the right to a fair and balanced trial. The bill expressly notes that it does not affect any existing powers the courts have to control or dismiss proceedings, which might include circumstances where a court determines that a fair hearing of a matter is impossible due to a lack of evidence caused by the passage of time. However, any such decision would be a matter for the court to apply at their discretion to protect the proper administration of justice, and not through any exercise of right by a defendant.

The work of the Family and Community Development Committee, and the courage of survivors who have spoken and continue to speak about their past abuse has been invaluable. We have seen how the debilitating effects of child abuse often entirely prevent survivors from bringing claims before the expiry of civil limitation periods, and we have therefore removed these time barriers to give survivors of child abuse the opportunity ‘as of right’ to bring their claims before a court, making Victoria a leader in this area across Australia and the world.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) on motion of Mr Ondarchie.

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 26 March.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM AMENDMENT (CHILD SAFE SCHOOLS) BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time on motion of Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills); by leave, ordered to be read second time forthwith.

Statement of compatibility

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

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the charter act), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Child Safe Schools) Bill 2015.

In my opinion, the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Child Safe Schools) Bill 2015 (the bill), as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The bill proposes amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (ETR act) to add a minimum standard for registration of government and non-government schools about managing child safety and responding to allegations of child abuse within Victorian schools. The amendment is the first step to implementing the government’s response to recommendations 12.1 and 16.1 of the report of the Family and Community Development Committee of the Parliament: *Betrayal of Trust — Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations* (*Betrayal of Trust* report).

Recommendation 16.1 of the *Betrayal of Trust* report recommended that the government review procedures for responding to allegations of criminal child abuse within Victorian schools and identify a benchmark to apply to non-government schools. Recommendation 12.1 of the *Betrayal of Trust* report recommended that government implement minimum standards for maintaining ‘child-safe environments’ for all organisations with direct and regular contact with children.

The bill will amend the ETR act to require registered schools to satisfy the schools regulator, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (the VRQA), that they have taken actions, in accordance with a ministerial order, to manage the risk of child abuse, including responses to allegations of child abuse.

The bill would empower the minister to make a ministerial order to prescribe (in a manner consistent with the government’s approach to implementing related *Betrayal of*

Trust recommendations) the actions that schools are required to take to achieve a child-safe environment.

The bill also enhances the VRQA's powers to monitor and review school compliance with the minimum standards of registration, including the new standard concerning the protection of children from child abuse within schools. The VRQA's powers to collect and disclose information will be widened.

Human rights issues

Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill

The following charter act rights are relevant:

the right to privacy and reputation, set out in section 13 of the charter act; and

the right to protection of families and children, set out in section 17 of the charter act.

Are the relevant charter rights actually limited by the bill?

Privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the charter act is relevant to clause 12 of the bill. Section 13 of the charter provides that a person has the right not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with.

Clause 12 of the bill would broaden the VRQA's ability to share information that it has obtained during the performance of its functions with a prescribed group of persons or bodies.

Currently the VRQA has limited information disclosure powers under section 4.9.4 of the ETR act concerning the kinds of information that can be shared, and the entities with which it can be shared. The VRQA may only disclose to the secretary of the department, a department of the commonwealth government or to another registering body, and only with respect to information about or arising from:

the registration or approval of a person or body including the application for that registration or approval;

a compliance audit conducted about a person or body;

any action the VRQA takes in relation to a registered or approved person or body;

the performance of a function or the exercise of a power by a person at the request of another registering body; and

the breach of, or failure to comply with, a government training contract by a registered training organisation (which provides vocational education and training).

The bill proposes to extend the class of prescribed persons or bodies the VRQA is authorised to disclose information to under section 4.9.4 of the ETR act. The amended class includes the secretary of another department of the Victorian government, a public sector body, a municipal council, a registering body, a school registering body, a department of the commonwealth, state or territory government, and an agency of the commonwealth.

The bill also proposes a less prescriptive approach to identifying the circumstances in which the VRQA may disclose information. Instead, the bill will authorise the VRQA to disclose information to a prescribed person or body if that information relates to the recipient's performance of a function.

Most information the VRQA obtains relates to the registration of a school. However, the VRQA may also incidentally collect information of a personal nature. For instance, the VRQA may collect personal information about individual students, and school staff who work with those students.

The bill authorises the VRQA to disclose information about a school's registration to another Victorian government department (such as the Department of Health and Human Services), or a government agency or regulator in another jurisdiction where the school has interstate campuses or operations. The amendments also authorise the VRQA to disclose information about, for example, safety issues to the appropriate government entity, such as the Victorian WorkCover Authority. In any of these circumstances, the VRQA may disclose personal information.

I consider that such information disclosure is not unlawful, nor arbitrary. The proposed law authorises information sharing by the VRQA for purposes related to the functions and powers of the recipient. The sharing of such information is lawful. The sharing of information is not arbitrary since it is always connected to the performance of a lawful function. This sharing of information is necessary to ensure that regulatory bodies and government agencies are able to efficiently access necessary and relevant information.

In my opinion, the provisions are compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the charter act.

Protection of families and children

Section 17(2) of the charter act provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to protection that is in his or her best interests and is needed by reason of being a child. Section 17(2) recognises that children are vulnerable because of their age and entitled to special protection.

Clause 5 of the bill creates a new condition of registration for all schools. The condition will be implemented through a regulatory framework that will require schools to take actions to manage the risks of child abuse, and to achieve a child-safe environment. The actions required of schools will be in accordance with a ministerial order made under the ETR act.

Actions that might be prescribed in the ministerial order include developing and implementing recruitment policies for school staff who work with children, revising procedures for responding to allegations of child abuse, or providing guidance or training to decision-makers and other school staff about managing the risk of child abuse. The intention is to improve the capabilities of schools to manage and mitigate the risk of child abuse and respond appropriately to allegations of child abuse. This is important since any abuse that occurs would infringe the rights of the child.

I consider the proposed framework for schools upholds and promotes the rights of children to be protected from abuse.

The Hon. Steve Herbert, MP
Minister for Training and Skills

*Second reading***Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard* on motion of Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills).**

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

This bill proposes amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (ETR act) to enable the implementation in Victorian schools of the government's response to certain recommendations made by the Family and Community Development Committee (the committee) to the previous Parliament.

On 13 November 2013 the committee tabled in the other place its report entitled *Betrayal of Trust — Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations* (the *Betrayal of Trust* report). The committee made a number of findings and recommendations about monitoring organisations' responses to child abuse, and preventing child abuse occurring in organisations.

This bill will take the first steps toward implementing recommendations 12.1 and 16.1 of the *Betrayal of Trust* report in Victoria's schools.

Recommendation 12.1 of the *Betrayal of Trust* report recommended that the government implement minimum standards for maintaining 'child-safe environments' for all organisations with direct and regular contact with children. The government has a policy agenda regarding the development of minimum standards for a child-safe environment for organisations that work closely with children. This bill would give effect to that policy with respect to schools.

Recommendation 16.1 of the *Betrayal of Trust* report recommended that the government review the procedures used by Victorian government schools for reporting and responding to allegations of criminal child abuse, and identify a benchmark to apply to non-government schools.

While the government has further work to do to fully respond to recommendations 12.1 and 16.1 of the *Betrayal of Trust* report, and to implement in full the remaining recommendations in the *Betrayal of Trust* report, this bill will ensure that in future all Victorian schools are required to take action to better manage and reduce the risk of child abuse, including through their responses to allegations of child abuse. This bill will make this requirement one of the minimum standards for school registration.

This bill will establish a framework that empowers the Minister for Education to make a ministerial order under the ETR act that specifies the actions that schools must take to create a child-safe environment in order to meet the newly proposed minimum standard for school registration.

Although further deliberation and consultation with schools is needed before the particular content of the ministerial order

can be determined, the government anticipates that the ministerial order may require schools to have in place appropriate recruitment and staff management policies, guidance for people occupying positions of trust, or complaint management and resolution procedures.

The bill also enhances the range of compliance and enforcement actions the schools regulator — the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (the VRQA) — can take to uphold the minimum standards for registration, including the new minimum standard for managing the risk of child abuse in the schools context.

The ETR act provides that the VRQA must not register a school unless the school complies with the minimum standards for registration. The VRQA may suspend or cancel school registration if it finds after a review of operations that the school has failed to comply with a minimum standard for registration.

The bill grants the VRQA greater flexibility and discretion when conducting a review into a school's compliance with one or more of the minimum standards for registration.

The bill will restore the VRQA's power to issue binding guidelines to registered schools.

The guidelines may relate to one or more of the minimum standards for registration, including the new child-safe schools standard.

The bill will empower the VRQA to register and enforce an undertaking that is given voluntarily by a school that is the subject of a review. An enforceable undertaking can secure a school's future compliance with a minimum standard for registration, and can be a practical alternative to the VRQA's other compliance and enforcement options — such as suspension or cancellation of registration.

The bill will clarify the types of conditions on registration that the VRQA may impose on a school. A condition on registration may be expressed to operate for a limited period of time, rather than throughout the registration period. In addition, the bill clarifies that the VRQA may impose a condition on registration in connection with a review of a school's operations. Usually these conditions are imposed after the completion of the review; however, the bill will also permit the VRQA to impose an interim condition on registration during the course of conducting a review but only in urgent or exceptional circumstances — for example, to ensure student safety. The bill includes clear procedural protections for the school when the VRQA proposes to take such action.

The bill will also authorise the VRQA to relevantly collect and share information with a wider class of Victorian government agencies, and regulators in other jurisdictions. Currently the VRQA is not authorised to disclose information about school safety issues to the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, or the Victorian WorkCover Authority. The amendments would allow such information to be shared more widely within government.

Lastly, the bill will make several statute law revision amendments to correct typographical errors and outdated references.

In conclusion, the bill will amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to put in place the necessary arrangements

to ensure that registered schools better manage the risk of child abuse, including responding to allegations of child abuse.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) on motion of Mr Ondarchie.

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 26 March.

LEGAL PROFESSION UNIFORM LAW APPLICATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time on motion of Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills); by leave, ordered to be read second time forthwith.

Statement of compatibility

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

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the 'charter'), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Amendment Bill 2015.

In my opinion, the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Amendment Bill 2015, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Human rights issues

Section 6 of the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014 overrides the charter in respect of the Legal Profession Uniform Law (uniform law), and bodies performing functions or exercising powers under the uniform law. However, statements of compatibility are still required for any bills that amend the uniform law.

At section 13, the charter provides that a person has the right not to have his or her privacy 'unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with'. This is relevant to clause 26 of the bill, which inserts a new section into the Legal Profession Uniform Law (uniform law) to provide that a 'relevant person' may disclose information obtained in the administration of the Legal Profession Uniform Law or the Legal Profession Uniform Rules to a person or body in a non-participating jurisdiction (that is, a state or territory that has not applied the Legal Profession Uniform Law) in relation to a function of that person or body under a law which corresponds to the Legal Profession Uniform Law.

A 'relevant person' is defined to mean a range of persons and bodies performing functions under the Legal Profession Uniform Law. In Victoria, it includes the Victorian Legal

Services Board and commissioner (and their delegates) and the Victorian Legal Admissions Board.

The kind of information disclosed under the new provision could include personal information — for example, information relating to a disciplinary investigation into a particular legal practitioner.

The disclosure of information as contemplated by clause 26 of the bill would not be unlawful as it would be authorised by legislation. It would also not be arbitrary, as it would need to occur in connection with the respective roles of the person or body performing functions under the Legal Profession Uniform Law, and the person or body performing functions under a corresponding law — that is, it would need to be connected with their mutual responsibilities for regulation of the Australian legal profession.

Also, the additional power to disclose information conferred by clause 26 extends only to persons or bodies in Australian states and territories other than NSW (disclosure to NSW is already authorised by the uniform law). Each Australian state or territory has a regime, either legislative or administrative, for protecting personal information, to which the relevant persons or bodies would be subject.

The Hon. Steve Herbert, MP
Minister for Training and Skills

Second reading

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — As a courtesy to the house I advise that this bill was amended in the other house. The proposed amendment adds a clause to the bill that modifies the definition of 'law firm' in the uniform law for the purposes of Victoria.

The definition of law firm in the uniform law provides that it is a partnership of Australian legal practitioners or Australian-registered foreign lawyers. This is the definition currently in use in most states and territories. However, in Victoria the current definition of law firm under the Legal Profession Act 2004 also includes firms in which incorporated legal practices can be partners. The Law Institute of Victoria estimates that there are around 100 of these firms currently operating in Victoria. One consequence of adopting the uniform law in Victoria will be that these partnerships of incorporated legal practices may no longer be defined as law firms and may therefore not be effectively covered by the new regulatory regime.

The government wishes to provide a firm regulatory footing for these firms and ensure that they are not burdened with the need to restructure to ensure compliance with the uniform law. The proposed amendment will ensure that the current definition of law firm in Victoria is maintained so that the uniform law includes these partnerships of incorporated legal practices.

The proposed amendment will also clarify that, in the case of a partnership of incorporated legal practices, the legal practitioner principals of the incorporated legal practices that make up the partnership are also principals of the partnership itself. This will provide further regulatory certainty for these firms. The proposed amendment will only apply in Victoria, and not in NSW or any other jurisdiction that subsequently applies the uniform law.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard* on motion of Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills).

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The bill will make a number of minor and technical amendments to the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014, in preparation for the full commencement of that act, which is currently planned for 1 July this year.

When it commences, the act, together with corresponding legislation in NSW, will create a harmonised system for the regulation of the legal profession in Victoria and NSW. The system has scope to be expanded to all other states and territories, ultimately creating a national scheme for the regulation of the Australian legal profession. This has the potential to deliver significant benefits to the legal profession through the elimination of red tape, but also, importantly, to consumers of legal services through the creation of nationwide best practice standards and regulatory frameworks. New statutory authorities, including the Legal Services Council and the Commissioner for Uniform Legal Services Regulation, have already been established under the scheme, and are currently preparing for its full commencement.

The bill will make an important technical amendment to the provisions of the act dealing with the requirement for a law practice to disclose to its clients its expected costs in each matter. The amendment will clarify the use of the term 'total legal costs' so that these provisions, which are a critical consumer protection element of the act, are clear on their face and can be readily interpreted by legal practitioners and their clients.

Specifically, the amendment will make it clear when the term 'total legal costs' is intended to exclude GST and disbursements. This will help to resolve an inconsistency with the term 'legal costs', which is defined to always be inclusive of disbursements. The amendment will also clarify that a new uniform standard disclosure form which may be used for inexpensive matters may require the disclosure of GST and disbursements. The form is currently under development by the Legal Services Council and is planned to apply to matters under \$3000.

The bill will also provide regulatory authorities operating under the uniform scheme with power to share information

with interstate regulatory authorities, including with those in jurisdictions that have not applied the uniform law, such as may occur currently under the existing legal profession regulatory regimes in Victoria and NSW. This will ensure that regulatory authorities operating under the uniform scheme are able to collaborate appropriately with their interstate counterparts to help them anticipate and respond to regulatory risks.

The bill will correct an anomaly in the drafting of the act to ensure the continued jurisdiction of the Victorian Costs Court in respect of matters initiated under previous legal profession legislation, and will make other minor, technical and statute law revision amendments.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) on motion of Mr Ondarchie.

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 26 March.

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING
AMENDMENT (HAIRDRESSING
REGISTRATION) BILL 2015**

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time on motion of Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children); by leave, ordered to be read second time forthwith.

Statement of compatibility

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 ('the charter'), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Hairdressing Registration) Bill 2015.

In my opinion, the bill, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The bill amends the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to provide for the registration, on an ongoing rather than periodic basis, of premises in which certain businesses are conducted.

1. Human rights protected by the charter act that are relevant to the bill

The bill does not engage any human rights protected by the charter.

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

As the bill does not engage any of the human rights protected by the charter it is unnecessary to consider the application of section 7(2) of the charter.

Conclusion

I consider the bill is compatible with the charter as it does not raise any human rights issues.

Jenny Mikakos, MP
Minister for Families and Children

Second reading

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard* on motion of Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children).

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The purpose of this bill is to reduce the burden and cost of regulation for many hairdressing and make-up businesses, while maintaining the capacity for local government to deal with any public health risks arising out of the operation of these businesses.

This is a common-sense change that will benefit over 4000 small businesses whose activities have been assessed as posing negligible public health risks. It gives effect to the government's election commitment to reduce business regulation wherever possible, while preserving the integrity of systems designed to protect public health and safety.

The vast majority of hairdressing and beauty salons are small businesses. The government recognises that small businesses face many day to day challenges, and have less capacity to absorb the costs of regulation than medium sized or larger businesses.

Some regulation is an inescapable part of doing business in today's world. The community rightly expects governments to regulate where necessary to protect public health and safety.

However, it is also incumbent on governments to ensure that regulation is well designed, proportionate to risk and does not impose inefficiencies or unjustifiable costs on businesses and community organisations.

Honourable members will be aware that the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 requires certain business premises to be registered with local councils. This requirement aims to ensure that the regulated businesses comply with standards set out in the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009. Those regulations require business operators to ensure their premises, equipment and work systems are clean and hygienic.

Along with premises within which services such as tattooing or body piercings occur, hairdressing and beauty therapy premises are required to be registered, and to pay a registration fee. These businesses are required to renew their registration periodically — usually annually — and to pay a fee each time they renew their registration.

The registration fee is set by councils. The average annual fee paid by hairdressers to councils is about \$170 per year.

To ensure business operators are complying with health and hygiene standards, council enforcement officers generally inspect the premises when they first open, and then annually when registrations are renewed.

This bill provides for a new, streamlined registration system for businesses that only provide hairdressing and/or make-up services which do not involve intentional skin penetration.

These businesses will no longer need to keep renewing their premises registration annually, or to pay a fee for renewal of their registration. Instead, from 1 March 2016, these businesses can apply to their local council for a 'one-off', or permanent, registration.

Alternatively, these businesses can wait until councils forward the normal registration renewal forms to them, usually towards the end of the year, in this case 2016, to apply for the new 'one-off' registration.

Registration will be ongoing unless the business is sold or moves to a different business address.

In practice, the amendments will mean that councils will inspect businesses when they first register, rather than on an annual basis.

The changes will save each of these businesses about \$170 per year. They will also be spared the time and effort of submitting annual renewal forms to councils, and the time taken to undergo annual inspections with council enforcement officers, which entail opportunity costs.

This bill represents a risk-based approach to public health regulation. It is based on the principle that regulatory burden and the resources of regulators — in this case councils — should be targeted to address real risks to public health.

Under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, councils have an important duty to protect, promote and improve public health within their municipalities. Councils have a trained workforce of environmental health officers who handle many diverse public health issues responsively at the local level.

These changes will free up council officers to focus on genuine public health risks, and assist councils to manage their limited regulatory resources effectively.

Businesses solely providing hairdressing services and those applying temporary make-up pose a low public health risk, as these services do not involve intentional penetration of the skin. An analysis of council enforcement data about hairdressing businesses undertaken by the Department of Health and Human Services has confirmed that this is a low-risk industry sector. Councils report that they receive very few complaints from the public about hairdressing and make-up businesses.

Councils also report they are required to investigate very few alleged incidents. And these incidents do not relate to conditions that generally pose risks to public health.

Hairdressing and make-up businesses that also perform other services that pose higher risks to health, such as tattooing and body piercing, will continue to be regulated under the current arrangements — that is, they will continue to be required to renew their registration periodically, and be subject to minimum health and hygiene standards and regular inspections.

Councils will still keep a register of hairdressing and make-up businesses. This will mean they can keep track of these businesses, and can properly monitor and respond to any complaints from the community that may arise about a particular business.

Hairdressing and make-up businesses will still be required to comply with minimum standards of cleanliness and hygiene under the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009.

Council officers will retain all of their existing powers to inspect these businesses, and to monitor and enforce compliance with cleanliness and hygiene laws. They will also retain their current powers to cancel or suspend the registration of a business, as a last resort, if the business does not comply with public health laws.

I am pleased to note that, during consultations, the hair and beauty industry has indicated widespread support for the changes, which will particularly benefit very small businesses with limited liquidity. Local government is also supportive of this initiative.

The government looks forward to working collaboratively with industry and local government to make sure the changes are communicated to key stakeholders in a clear and timely manner.

This will enable business and local government to plan for the changes, to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements.

The bill strikes a sensible balance between reducing the burden of business regulation while retaining safeguards for public health, and the department will continue to monitor the adequacy and balance of the regulatory environment following its passage.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) on motion of Mr Ondarchie.

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 26 March.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Sandringham railway station

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport and it relates to Sandringham railway station, in particular the issue of commuter parking around the station.

We all know that there are ever-increasing numbers of people using our trains, and that is a very good thing. We also know that all the reputable studies that have been done into this issue show that this situation is going to continue. However, one effect of this in Sandringham is excessive parking in streets and shopping areas around the railway station. Sandringham station is at the end of the line. Some people use buses, but many people drive their cars to and park around the station. There is some parking at the station, but there are nowhere near sufficient parking spaces for everybody who wishes to use them. As a result the parking is overflowing into domestic streets nearby and the short-term parking that exists in the shopping centre around the train station.

It is not a good thing for people to park their cars in short-term parking spaces and leave them for many hours past the parking time that those parking spots are meant to be used for. There is a need to provide for a turnover of cars in those parking spaces, enabling people to come in, do their business in Sandringham village and then leave so that others can do the same.

This problem is not unique to Sandringham station. Many of our stations are old. The one I am talking about was opened in the 1880s, so we are still living with the town planning of many, many years ago.

I want to pay tribute to the previous government's efforts to upgrade stations, utilise the land around them and respond to ongoing community needs. There is a very good example of this near my house, at Hampton, where the Hampton station precinct incorporates, for example, the community centre that has existed for a number of decades. It is very close to the train station, and it will now be incorporated into that precinct along with a number of other facilities that are relevant to the many people who use that station.

My question to the Minister for Public Transport is that given the layout of Sandringham station, the area that surrounds it and the government land around the area — of which there is quite a range — what plans, if any, exist to address the issues of parking around the station before they reach crisis level? I would appreciate the minister's response.

Costerfield antimony mine

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. The matter I wish to raise relates to concerns held by my constituents in the Costerfield and Heathcote areas as to the operation of Australia's only antimony mine run by Mandalay Resources and the ongoing impact it is having on local residents. I am aware that the minister met with the community during last year's election campaign in her capacity as the shadow minister and that, like me, she has heard directly from residents.

Some pretty scary stories are coming from this community. They have told me about their fears about toxic dust from the site contaminating the air and local water supplies. There are multiple reports of health issues, from skin irritations to respiratory problems and headaches, and testing on residents has found high levels of antimony, arsenic and other minerals in their systems.

The new member for Euroa in the other place refuses to meet with them. This community felt nothing but neglect and disregard from the previous government. I will not ignore this community. I commit to working with them, and in doing so I ask the minister to inform the community what steps she plans to take to ensure that adequate monitoring of the site takes place, that necessary testing is undertaken and that an effective enforcement regime is applied to any detected non-compliance or breaches of regulations and permit requirements.

Melbourne International Film Festival

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Creative Industries. It concerns the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) premiere fund's current operations, which are due to expire this year. The MIFF premiere fund provides vital minority co-funding to new Australian feature films and documentaries. The fund is part of a suite of MIFF industry programs, including MIFF 37° South Market and the emerging director workshop, MIFF Accelerator, which are funded until 2017, but the MIFF premiere funding is due to expire in mid-2015.

I recently met with the fund's executive producer, Mark Woods, and deputy chair, Andrew Myer. They reported that to continue operations the MIFF premiere fund would need the government to commit to a \$3.7 million four-year renewal, which is in line with the Adelaide Film Festival fund. Their proposal is to gradually

increase funding from the present \$800 000 per annum to \$1 million by 2018–19. They advised that the MIFF premiere fund has helped to finance 45 Australian films, which have featured at MIFF world premieres and regional tours of Victoria and have gone on to be selected for many overseas festivals.

The fund has global recognition and enhances the Melbourne International Film Festival as Australia's leading film festival. It provides employment, boosts local production and stimulates the economy. It has low administrative costs, at 17 per cent versus 24 per cent for the majority of film agencies.

I have received many letters from filmmakers, producers, directors, workers in the film industry and MIFF-goers in support of the \$3.7 million four-year renewal, highlighting the valuable role that the fund provides in profiling independent Australian films and growing the Victorian film industry. It is important that governments provide ongoing support to programs like the MIFF premiere fund in order to maintain a thriving creative arts industry and community.

My request to the minister is that he advocate for the inclusion of the \$3.7 million four-year renewal of the MIFF premiere fund in this year's budget.

West Gippsland Hospital

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for her to provide a timetable and funding for the fulfilment of Labor's election promise to conduct a comprehensive study to identify the health care needs of West Gippsland residents.

Baw Baw shire is one of the fastest growing regional municipalities in Victoria. While there has been investment, the existing health infrastructure has to keep up with the demand of that local community. A very strong group has been advocating on behalf of the needs of the people in West Gippsland, including the Committee for Gippsland, the Baw Baw Shire Council, the West Gippsland Healthcare Group and of course Gary Blackwood, the member for Narracan in the other place. What they advocate for and what they say is needed is a new hospital in Warragul.

With the significant increase that has been seen in the number of patients treated at West Gippsland Hospital, there has also been a significant increase in emergency department presentations and a significant increase in the number of births. Interestingly, the growth projections are being well exceeded in terms of things

like births and the general demand. The growth is expected to occur in the Warragul and Drouin areas.

The former government delivered a \$3.7 million expansion of the emergency department, which doubled the number of treatment spaces. We also promised additional theatre capacity, a revamped ward 3 and additional accommodation, but the advocates advise me that this new hospital is needed. There need to be more beds, further operating theatres, improved access to areas such as ambulance bays and the emergency department, potentially a residential aged-care facility and a helipad. A site has been purchased by the West Gippsland Healthcare Group, which has also been earmarked in Baw Baw Shire Council's precinct structure plan. The capacity is therefore there and the need is there. What is now needed is for the Labor government to fulfil the commitment it made. At the time the shadow Minister for Health, Gavin Jennings:

... was encouraging that the ALP would support a 'new hospital' for Warragul ...

That is reported in the Warragul and Drouin *Gazette* of 18 November.

Because of the significant growth occurring in the area and because of the need for additional health services to meet that need, I ask the minister whether she can provide some clarity as to the extent, timetable and funding of this comprehensive study to which there has been a commitment. The advocates say that about \$5 million is needed for what they call a business case, and I seek that that be committed to in the upcoming budget.

Duck season

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — The adjournment issue I raise today is directed to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. It is led by a concern expressed by many rural communities at the loss of economic value where various factors have influenced the duck hunting season. For many years small country towns have benefited from the influx of hunters during the hunting season. They come from all over Victoria, and many travel from interstate to experience a long-held tradition and enjoyable sport. Swamps and lakes draw in convoys of four-wheel drives and boats into the neighbouring towns such as Kerang, near the Ramsar-listed wetlands; Donald, near Lake Buloke; and, in previous years, Benalla, near Lake Mokoan and the Winton Wetlands. Several newspaper articles have circulated in the past few days highlighting this. An article in the *Weekly Times* says:

Thousands of Victorian shooters are expected to travel to Gippsland for the opening of the duck hunting season on Saturday morning.

...

Geoff Abrahall, owner of hunting supplier H&S Firearms in Sale, said ...

'The last two weeks I have been run ragged so I know we are going to have lots of shooters here this weekend' ...

An article in the *Wangaratta Chronicle* has stated that the lack of waterways open to shooters this year is partly to blame for absences to occur this weekend in the local scene, in places such as the Lower Ovens and Lake Mokoan.

An article in the *Gannawarra Times* says:

... the influx of hunters provided an economic boon to the region.

According to government figures, hunters spent \$10.4 million in the shire of Gannawarra in 2013, including \$5 million in Kerang alone.

I urge the minister to make observations of the economic impact of the movement of hunters and reflect on the \$439 million shown in recent reports to have been injected into Victoria, with much of this going to regional Victoria.

Wodonga Middle Years College

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — Tonight on the adjournment on behalf of the member for Benambra in the other place, Bill Tilley, and myself I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education regarding the Wodonga Middle Years College Huon campus. My request of the minister is for the Andrews Labor government to provide the Wodonga community with access to improved education facilities for students and families by matching or bettering the coalition's \$4.3 million commitment to upgrade the campus. During the election campaign the coalition committed \$4.3 million to boost Wodonga education by undertaking a major capital upgrade of the Huon campus. Mr Tilley and the coalition have a proven track record of caring about the education of the Wodonga and wider community.

During a single term in government the coalition delivered \$10 million for Wodonga Senior Secondary College, \$12 million for the new Belvoir Special School, \$3.8 million for Wodonga West Primary School and \$728 000 in additional maintenance funding for schools in Benambra. In contrast the Andrews government has made no commitments to improving education opportunities for the Wodonga community

and in fact made not a single election commitment to the district of Benambra.

My request of the minister is, as I said, for the government to provide the Wodonga community with access to improved education facilities for students and families by matching or bettering the coalition's \$4.3 million commitment to upgrade the Wodonga Middle Years College Huon campus.

Burnside Children's and Community Centre

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Families and Children, who is also the Minister for Youth Affairs, the Honourable Jenny Mikakos. It regards the family hub for Burnside and Caroline Springs within my electorate. Recently, alongside Melton City Council representatives, I was very proud to see the turning of the first sod marking the commencement of construction of this vital centre, which will support families and young children in the western suburbs. The centre, which will welcome more than 80 children per day, is just another example of the Andrews Labor government's commitment to bettering the livelihoods of people living in the west and ensuring that we have access to much-needed services to cope with the ever-growing population and demand in the region. That is why we made a commitment to ensure that women's and children's health outcomes were our top priority when we announced the construction of the women's and children's centre at Sunshine Hospital.

This family centre will offer support to the next stage of development of services, from delivery to maternal health and preschool for families in the west. A total of \$1.6 million has been allocated to the centre by the government to provide 165 kindergarten spots for three-year-olds per week and a total of 132 kindergarten places for four-year-olds. In addition the centre will offer 25 occasional care places for children per day and offer maternal and child health and early childhood intervention services, parenting groups and playgroups. With the commencement of construction on this centre having already begun, I ask the minister: when will the centre be operational, and what future plans does the government have in other areas to support the construction of centres such as this one to nurture the development of Victorian children and their families?

Royal Children's Hospital gender dysphoria service

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Honourable Jill

Hennessy, the Minister for Health. I call on the Minister for Health to formally allocate funding in the government's 2015–16 budget to the Royal Children's Hospital gender dysphoria service. Gender dysphoria is the formal diagnosis used by psychologists to describe people who experience significant discontent with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth. A greater awareness of transgender identities and non-binary bodies has meant that the number of children accessing medical treatment to help them transition to the gender with which they identify has increased exponentially.

In 2014 Dr Michelle Telfer, a clinical leader at the Royal Children's Hospital and the head of the gender dysphoria service, noted that she had received 104 new referrals of gender-questioning children and adolescents, equating to 2 per week. There were also possible referrals that required further assessment. In 2015 that number has increased enormously and it is estimated that the rate will continue to escalate.

Currently the waiting list for treatment is one year, and Dr Telfer has advised that without any funding for more staff, the department will have a crisis within six months. She went on to tell me that among young people who are not supported in expressing and having treatment for their gender dysphoria, approximately 30 per cent will attempt suicide, and the evidence is that they are at greatest risk in the time between deciding they want to pursue treatment and actually being able to access the treatment.

The impact of this underfunded service places enormous emotional and physical strain not only on the children seeking the service but also on their families, who face significant financial and legal barriers to access this life-changing, and in many circumstances life-saving, treatment. Dedicated funding for the Royal Children's Hospital gender dysphoria service will ensure that children who are going through tumultuous changes can access the treatment they desperately require.

Police numbers

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — This evening I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police. It was an absolute privilege last Friday to attend the graduation ceremony of 44 new members of Victoria Police at the Victoria Police Academy. They began their training in the middle of last year, and I am sure they will serve the Victorian community and the Victoria Police force with distinction. It was a great pleasure also to inspect the police academy and see much of the new infrastructure that was delivered by the previous coalition government, with the upgrading

of the academy and more modern facilities, including the delivery of new education facilities and resources that it needs.

Now the academy needs recruits. After the largest single recruitment drive in Victoria Police history, adding more than 1900 police during the previous government's term of office, the Labor government of Daniel Andrews and Minister Noonan has put a stop to that. Now Victoria Police is recruiting to replace natural attrition. As you, President, and other members of the house would know, the population of Victoria is increasing quite quickly by approximately 2000 people per week. I am advised that the situation is that the numbers of members of Victoria Police will stay roughly static. In comments reported in the *Age* Minister Noonan has confirmed that. He said that no additional police will be made available until statements are made in the May budget. With a population growing by approximately 2000 people a week, we cannot wait for the May budget.

The program that the coalition government started needs to continue. As Victoria's population continues to grow, so should Victoria's police force. In the crime statistics released today we see that there are new and emerging challenges, whether they be in the space of family violence or the use of ice and other illicit drugs. Coupled with other challenges, we need the Victoria Police force to continue to grow. The action I seek from Minister Noonan is that he reconsider the government's position on the recruitment of officers for Victoria Police and that he initiate a campaign to grow the number of police in Victoria to at least match the population growth that Victoria is experiencing.

Vocational education and training

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Training and Skills and relates to substandard and unsatisfactory — or dodgy, in more colloquial terms — training providers in Eastern Victoria Region. I welcome the announcement by the Minister for Training and Skills of an urgent review into the quality of training currently and previously provided in Victoria's vocational education and training system. That announcement was made on 20 February, and it is another significant achievement in the delivery of an education agenda which was placed front and centre as part of Labor's commitments in the lead-up to the election.

I share the minister's concern about poor-quality registered training organisations and the issuing of substandard qualifications which do not necessarily

represent the provision of good-quality education and training which will enable people to find secure employment and retain it. It is clear to me that the previous government failed to act to protect some of our most vulnerable young people, including our young people in Eastern Victoria Region, and those seeking to re-enter the workforce or to increase their employment from underemployment to more substantive hours. I am shocked that in this year alone 2500 students have had their qualifications recalled, but conversely I am heartened to be advised that their training entitlement will be rightfully restored by the Andrews Labor government.

I am pleased that the Minister for Training and Skills — who this afternoon gave a significant speech in this place, for which I was grateful to be in attendance — is standing by the Andrews Labor government's commitment to stamp out dodgy, unsatisfactory or inappropriate service providers and to improve and make consistent the quality of Victoria's training system. The action that I seek from the Minister for Training and Skills is advice on what will be done when these unsatisfactory, substandard or dodgy providers are identified to make sure that we prevent or minimise any further undermining of access to quality education and training.

Fire services property levy

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Emergency Services. It concerns the preposterous pay rise the United Firefighters Union is seeking for its members and the consequential impact of that in the increase in the fire services property levy to pay for it. The United Firefighters Union is demanding an annual 10 per cent pay rise over three years amongst a range of other new and increased entitlements for its members that will cost the Victorian taxpayer more than \$1.6 billion per year. The union demands include an extra 350 career firefighters in a deal struck by the Premier with the union in the lead-up to the last election.

The Victorian Farmers Federation says that farmers, business owners and households will face a massive 80 per cent hike in their fire services property levies to pay for the union's demands. This massive increase is based on internal calculations by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) after the union presented its pay and entitlement demands. This levy is paid by all Victorian ratepayers and funds about 75 per cent of the CFA budget. I might add that a significant reform of the Baillieu-Napthine government provided equity and fairness, with all ratepayers funding the fire services of

Victoria and not just those who pay insurance. The amount of levy paid by ratepayers varies depending on council valuation and if the property is a private home, business or farm or if it is in a CFA or Metropolitan Fire Brigade fire region.

At a time when farming enterprises, business operators and homeowners are struggling with cost-of-living pressures, the Andrews government has an obligation to stand up to the unions and their outrageous demands. It is an issue for the Minister for Emergency Services. If the Andrews government caves in to the United Firefighters Union and requires that revenue for the increase in the CFA budget through the fire services property levy, it will have a significant impact on ratepayers. It must look at other forms of revenue to not only meet the union demands but also supplement the CFA budget so that the burden is not placed on the ratepayers of Victoria.

Anzac centenary

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Veterans. The action I seek is that the minister provide advice on the number of avenue of honour projects that have received government financial support during the past 12 months.

Last week I opened four bronze plaques that were placed at the start of the Beaconsfield Avenue of Honour. This project was worked on for a considerable period of time by many volunteers, including the Beaconsfield Progress Association and additional volunteers in the community, such as a local historian who worked for a long time to make sure that the names, ranks and serial numbers on the plaques are accurate, which is entirely appropriate.

The commemoration of the Anzac centenary year provides Victorians throughout the state with an opportunity to remember those who served in World War I, both overseas and on the home front, and in addition those who served in war more generally. The Anzac centenary community grants program is designed to support activities that commemorate veterans' service and is one of a number of grant programs. There are also a number of capital grant programs.

Supporting avenues of honour is one of the ways in which these grant programs assist communities to commemorate servicemen and servicewomen. It is important to note that Victoria has more avenues of honour than any other state or territory, and this is a way in which communities are able to commemorate

those who have served. When we look at the Beaconsfield Avenue of Honour, for example, we see that the state government, the local government and, more importantly, a number of volunteers have come together, and it is important that all these different groups work together. Continued funding by the state government and also by the Victorian Veterans Council will ensure that the sacrifice of servicemen and servicewomen will be remembered for generations to come.

Essendon level crossing

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport that concerns an issue in the Assembly electorate of Essendon. Whenever I go to Essendon or speak to people from Essendon there is one issue that is always the source of huge complaint, and that is the Buckley Street level crossing. I do not know how many members in the house are familiar with the Buckley Street level crossing, but it is adjacent to the Essendon railway station and is close to a number of schools — significantly large schools, I might say. It is near Mount Alexander Road, the Rose Street shopping precinct is across the road and Russell Street is adjacent to it. It is on the busy Craigieburn line, which is also used by a number of country trains, so members can understand why at certain times of the day there is total bedlam. People have been asking for some years for this level crossing to be removed.

I am very much hoping the people of Essendon do not have to wait for as long as the people of St Albans did to have their level crossing removed. I am hopeful the people of Essendon will not have to wait for the government of Matthew Guy, the Leader of the Opposition, after the next election to have this level crossing removed, because it is a source of enormous inconvenience to many people, many of whom have told me they have been stuck for up to half an hour as they have tried to get across it.

I am hopeful that when this magical list of level crossings the government keeps talking about is produced — if indeed it is produced — the Buckley Street level crossing will be high on the list. I ask the minister to ensure that she makes herself familiar with the Buckley Street level crossing and that she uses all her influence as a senior member of the government to ensure that the particular hazard that is the Buckley Street level crossing is removed for the people of Essendon in the not-too-distant future.

Sunbury municipality

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. It follows a visit Mr Finn and I made to Sunbury in recent times. We visited both the Hume City Council and the township of Sunbury.

I welcome the work of the Hume City Council but note the very clear and decisive vote that was held last year that saw Sunbury elect to leave Hume and go out on its own. This was a clear and democratic vote. What we now see is the Minister for Local Government dithering and responding to pressure from the Australian Services Union to frustrate and prevent the disaggregation of the council and therefore disregard the democratic electors who voted to see Sunbury go its own way.

The minister said to Channel 9 that Hume City Council had told her it had requested that this process not proceed. That is not the case. Mr Finn and I spoke to Hume City Council, and it was quite clear: it wants the government to take a decisive position, and the government has failed to provide it with that.

Mr Finn — They just want to know what is going on.

Mr DAVIS — That is right. The fact is that the previous Minister for Local Government gazetted this process and put in place the legal activity to make sure that Sunbury was able to go its own way. The bottom line is that this is a significant matter for the community of Sunbury. It wants to go its own way; it voted on it. The government ought to get on with the process of allowing the democratic vote to be respected.

The fact is that a Sunbury council would be viable. We know that from the consultations that were undertaken. We also know that Hume City Council would be viable too. Sunbury would be a middle size council in the state and would be very able to look after itself. Prior to the election the then Andrews opposition committed to honour this vote. I have seen the letter from the then shadow Minister for Local Government, the member for Richmond in the Assembly, Mr Wynne. He made it very clear that the government would honour the gazetting. The Andrews government either keeps its promises or it lies and breaks them. I call on the Minister for Local Government to step forward and honour Labor's election commitment to allow Sunbury to go its own way.

Cultural Diversity Week

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. It has been over 100 days since the Andrews government took office, and the Premier has claimed that not a minute has been wasted in that time. I was therefore disturbed to learn that neither the Premier nor the Minister for Multicultural Affairs said a single word in Parliament to mark a very important event, Cultural Diversity Week, which is a celebration of multicultural Victoria that is designated to be held between 14 and 21 March. Parliament will now not resume until 14 April, so the opportunity has been missed.

From my perspective, 144 000 minutes have been wasted instead of providing leadership at a time when many global circumstances are impinging upon our community. This situation calls for a clear sense of leadership and direction from those in positions of power and those who hold ministerial responsibility. That opportunity has been missed.

There is also a lot of uncertainty in terms of the future of the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Many programs face an uncertain future, in particular some that deal with young people. We do not want to see policies dissipate at a time when we need to keep the foot on the pedal in this very important area of government policy — that is, to build on the unity and harmony we have enjoyed in a bipartisan fashion in Victoria to insulate us from some of the more disturbing characteristics of having diverse communities living together.

I call on the minister to do what he took an oath of office to do — that is, fulfil his responsibilities to provide the leadership we need as a multicultural community, and he is facing some challenges in the future, and to bemoan the missed opportunity of showing his support for Cultural Diversity Week. He has one last chance. Harmony Day is on 21 March, but unfortunately it will not be marked in Parliament, as Parliament will not be sitting.

Responses

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — Ms Fitzherbert raised an issue for the Minister for Public Transport seeking information on plans to use land surrounding the Sandringham railway station for commuter parking. I will pass that on to the minister.

Ms Symes raised a matter for the Minister for Industry and Minister for Energy and Resources seeking information and action on adequate monitoring, testing and enforcement in relation to contamination at the Mandalay Resources site.

Ms Pennicuik had a request for the Minister for Creative Industries, seeking \$3.7 million for four-year renewable funding for the Premier Fund to support the Victorian film industry.

Ms Wooldridge raised a matter for the Minister for Health seeking timetabling and funding for a study of healthcare needs in West Gippsland.

Mr Young had a request for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. He asked the minister to provide information on the economic benefits of duck hunting to towns close to duck hunting sites.

Ms Lovell had a request for action for the Minister for Education and is seeking major capital upgrades for the Wodonga community college; the Huon campus, I believe.

Ms Lovell — The Wodonga college Huon campus.

Mr HERBERT — The Wodonga college Huon campus.

Mr Eideh had a request for the Minister for Families and Children and Minister for Youth Affairs, seeking information on when the family hub in Melton will become operational and on plans for other family hubs in the future.

Ms Patten raised a matter for the Minister for Health regarding funding for the Gender Dysphoria Service at the Royal Children's Hospital.

Mr O'Donohue had a request for the Minister for Police, seeking more police and linking police numbers to population growth.

Mr Ramsay raised an issue for the Minister for Emergency Services regarding pay rises for firefighters and seeking that the minister take action with regard to those pay claims.

Mr Mulino had a request for the Minister for Veterans, seeking information on the funding of avenue of honour projects.

Mr Finn raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking the removal of the Buckley Street level crossing.

Mr Davis had a request for the Minister for Local Government regarding the disaggregation of the Hume council and allowing Sunbury to leave the Hume council and form its own council.

Mrs Peulich raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, seeking that he provide leadership to the multicultural community, and I am sure he will. I will pass all those requests on to the relevant ministers for action.

Ms Shing had a matter for me regarding information on — —

Ms Wooldridge — Respond to it.

Mr HERBERT — Yes, I am going to. She is seeking information on what will happen to dodgy providers who provide inadequate, second-rate and poor-quality training in Victoria. I am pleased to respond to that request. It is a very serious issue, and I know the member has a strong and passionate belief that if it is government funding — even if it is private funding — people ought to be sure that the quality of the training they receive meets the competencies they are supposed to have and that the certification they receive actually reflects the skills they have. Those skills should be relevant for the positions that are available when people need to get jobs and progress in their lives.

Unfortunately that has not been the case in this state, and the previous government, let us be clear on this, had a very light touch when it came to enforcement in relation to poor-quality training. It instructed the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to have a light touch when it came to enforcement, and the authority had a light touch when it came to enforcement. That was clear, and we would have had to be going around with our eyes shut not to have known that — —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr HERBERT — I am responding to the request for action the member has sought. The facts were out there when we came to office, and I am happy to admit that in the dying days of the government it started to show stronger action and withdrew 3000 certificates. Currently in this state, in the short time since we came to office, we have withdrawn 2500 qualifications. There are at least 3000 qualifications currently under investigation. There are some 15 providers who are under case management. There are some 7 providers who have had a stop put on new commencements, and there is nearly \$16 million in payments that we have

withheld pending investigations. That is what has happened since this government has come to office.

The issue is about much more than that. The issue is about systemic rorting in many cases and in some industries of substantial public funding. We are talking about \$1.2 billion of public funding. I can assure the member that I was not happy with the process that was put in place or the actions — or the strength of those actions — that were taken in enforcing the requirement to offer proper training. There was training that should have taken 18 months being done in four weeks. There were third-party arrangements in place with very little quality control applied to them. There were situations where the vast majority of the money that should have been spent on training went to marketing and other sorts of enticements for people who did not have the skills to do the courses and did not have any prerequisites for that training. The vast majority of them dropped out. There was a large number of commencements with a large number of people dropping out of training because they did not have the skills and the training was of poor quality.

The member quite rightly asked me what we are doing about substandard providers, and I am happy to tell her that we have commissioned a complete review of our quality system. Deloitte has that contract, and it will look at the internal workings of the department in terms of the department's structure as well as the way it guarantees or assures quality, the way it does investigations and the way it manages contracts. It will also report on key issues that need to be addressed in the contractual system. When that report comes to me, the recommendations will be taken up and they will be put in place in Victoria. I will be happy to advise the house on those recommendations when that happens.

I thank the member for her question, and I assure her that under the Andrews Labor government we will not let the prevalence of dodgy, rorting trainers that proliferated under the previous government in this state continue. We will make sure Victorian taxpayers, industries and people get the value in training that they deserve and need.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I would like to check with the minister that he has mentioned Mr Ramsay's item.

Mr HERBERT — Yes, I did. It was in relation to pay rises for firefighters, and it requested that the minister take strong action on the pay claim of the union.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, President, am I able to move that the minister's response be taken into consideration the next day of meeting? I have not checked the standing orders, so I am assuming that you, President, would know better than I.

The PRESIDENT — It would be a first! My ruling is that the adjournment debate closes the house proceedings, so I am not in a position to entertain such a motion. Perhaps on the next day of meeting Mrs Peulich can take up that opportunity as another procedure.

I remind members both in the chamber and in their offices that we have Parliament House open day on Sunday. If members have an opportunity to attend, it would be appreciated by the staff. It is an event that usually attracts more than 4000 people to Parliament, many for the first time, and it is terrific if people get a chance to meet with some members. If members have the opportunity, by all means attend that event. I place on the record the appreciation of the Parliament to the staff who have invested a great deal of effort, enthusiasm and energy into preparing what is one of the key events for the Parliament in terms of engaging with the community.

The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.16 p.m. until Tuesday, 14 April.