

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, 26 May 2015

(Extract from book 7)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable ALEX CHERNOV, AC, QC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

The ministry

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Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade	The Hon. A. Somyurek, MLC
Minister for Planning	The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Ms M. Kairouz, MP

Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Mr Drum, Ms Hartland, Mr Herbert, Ms Mikakos, Ms Pulford, Mr Purcell, Mr Rich-Phillips, and Ms Wooldridge.

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

Legislative Council standing committees

Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure — Dr Carling-Jenkins, Mr Dalidakis, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr Morris and Mr Ondarchie.

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning — Ms Bath, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Davis, Ms Dunn, Mr Leane, Ms Shing, Ms Tierney and Mr Young.

Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues — Ms Fitzherbert, Mr Melhem, Mr Mulino, Mr O'Donohue, Ms Patten, Mrs Peulich, Ms Springle and Ms Symes.

Joint committees

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

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

Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr, Mr Melhem and Mr Purcell. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Mr Perera and Ms Ryall.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION**

President: The Hon. B. N. ATKINSON

Deputy President: Ms G. TIERNEY

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

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

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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
Bath, Ms Melina ²	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Mulino, Mr Daniel	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ¹	Eastern Victoria	Nats
Carling-Jenkins, Dr Rachel	Western Metropolitan	DLP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Patten, Ms Fiona	Northern Metropolitan	ASP
Dalla-Riva, Mr Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Pennicuik, Ms Susan Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Peulich, Mrs Inga	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
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Dunn, Ms Samantha	Eastern Metropolitan	Greens	Purcell, Mr James	Western Victoria	V1LJ
Eideh, Mr Khalil M.	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Ramsay, Mr Simon	Western Victoria	LP
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Fitzherbert, Ms Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred	Western Metropolitan	Greens	Springle, Ms Nina	South Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph	Northern Victoria	ALP	Symes, Ms Jaelyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Young, Mr Daniel	Northern Victoria	SFP
Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP			

¹ Resigned 25 February 2015

² Appointed 15 April 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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Tuesday, 26 May 2015

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 2.05 p.m. and read the prayer.

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 12 May to:

**Domestic Animals Amendment Act 2015
Jury Directions Act 2015
Mental Health Amendment Act 2015
National Parks Amendment (Prohibiting Cattle
Grazing) Act 2015.**

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

The PRESIDENT — Order! I was accompanied by members of the Legislative Council — Ms Symes and Mr Dalidakis — and officers of the Council on a visit to the Governor on 25 May and presented to him the address of the Legislative Council adopted on 6 May 2015 in reply to the Governor's speech at the opening of Parliament. The Governor was pleased to make the following reply:

President and honourable members of the Legislative Council:

In the name and on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen I thank you for your expressions of loyalty contained in the address you have just presented to me.

I fully rely on your wisdom in deliberating upon the important measures to be brought under your consideration, and I earnestly hope that the results of your labours will be conducive to the advancement and prosperity of this state.

NATIONAL SORRY DAY

The PRESIDENT — Order! I also take this opportunity to note that today is an important day in Australia's history. It is National Sorry Day. It is a day that is part of a broader period of thought and activity in respect of National Reconciliation Week.

It is interesting to consider the word 'sorry', because it is a word that is often used, and in itself it is important. When the federal Parliament, on behalf of all Australians, expressed its sorrow at what had happened to the stolen generations and the dislocation of so many Indigenous people in this country, it was certainly something that was embraced by the Indigenous people as a very important step on the road to reconciliation between them and those people who have made

Australia their home subsequent to the first European Australians arriving on these shores.

But obviously the word 'sorry' in itself is not an end, and it is not adequate in terms of addressing any of the issues outstanding in terms of the relationship between Australia and its Indigenous community, a community that has a very rich heritage and that is amongst the oldest communities in mankind's history. It is important for us, obviously, to continue the process of reconciliation, to look at addressing many of the issues that are still outstanding in the community with regard to the Indigenous people and to make sure not just that they are able to participate fully in the decisions and the activities of our country but indeed that they are able to take up leadership positions that are rightfully theirs because of the experience and the perspective they can bring to the table and the rich heritage they have as the first people of this nation.

I commend to everybody that they consider carefully some of the challenges and the possibilities of National Reconciliation Week and the importance of National Sorry Day.

MINISTRY

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I wish to inform the house that until advised otherwise the Premier is the acting Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, and under normal circumstances — which will continue — I represent the Premier in this chamber.

Ms Wooldridge — On a point of clarification regarding the changes that Minister Jennings has just outlined, would he be able to clarify if Minister Somyurek still holds his commission as a minister?

Mr Leane — That is not a point of order. I am not too sure the standing orders actually allow for someone to make a point of clarification. In this term it seems to have crept in quite a lot, especially when members are questioning your rulings, President. I do not mind if you do not want to give us a response now, but it may be something for your consideration into the future.

Mr Rich-Phillips — On Mr Leane's point, President, the Leader of the Government has just advised that until otherwise advised he is taking responsibility for another minister without providing — —

Mr Jennings — That's not what I said. You should have listened to what I was saying.

Mr Rich-Phillips — You did say ‘until advised otherwise’. Mr Jennings is representing another minister in this place without any explanation as to the absence of the minister or when he is going to return to his formal status as a minister.

The PRESIDENT — Order! On the point of order, I take up Mr Leane’s point. I agree: points of clarification are not really mentioned in our standing orders at all; therefore it is an indulgence of the house to accept points of clarification as such. However, I think on this occasion Ms Wooldridge essentially raises a point of order in the sense of a response to or seeking further information from the Leader of the Government, who has made a statement to the house.

Again, what the minister said was that the Premier was actually taking up the responsibilities of the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade in the interim period — not this minister, the Special Minister of State — although the minister has indicated that, as the representative of the Premier in this place, he is prepared to take questions. That is the actual process aspect of this. Ms Wooldridge’s point of order goes to the actual status of the minister in respect of the current circumstances, and I would invite the Leader of the Government to make some comment on that.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Thank you, President, and I congratulate you on being a better listener than some members of the opposition, because in fact I did inform the house that the Premier was the acting Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade — the Premier — and that I represent the Premier on all matters in this chamber, so that is the direct linear connection behind what I advised the house.

In relation to Mr Somyurek’s commission, Mr Somyurek has been stood down as a minister pending an investigation into relevant matters arising from a complaint that was made the other day. I would have anticipated being asked a question about this matter if the opposition were interested in the matter. In terms of the ministerial responsibilities, they are clear — the Premier is the acting minister.

Ms Wooldridge — I am happy to couch this as a point of order because it goes to the heart of how this house operates and the minister’s functions within it. I do not believe the point of order has been addressed directly in relation to the fundamental question: what status does Minister Somyurek hold as a minister? Does he still hold his commission? It goes to the question: when he returns to this house, will he be answering

questions in his capacity as a minister if he still holds the commission?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will allow the Leader of the Government to answer that, but I would have thought that the last part was self-evident at any rate.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The ministers who answer questions in the Parliament are the ministers who in fact have the delegated responsibility from the Premier, confirmed by the Governor, and in accordance reported to the house.

Mr Dalla-Riva — I raise a point of order in relation to standing orders 3.01 and 3.02. For the clarification of members, 3.01 states:

Every member will attend the service of the Council, unless given leave of absence by the Council on account of his or her own illness, the illness or death of a near relation, urgent business, or for other sufficient cause to be stated to the Council.

Further, standing order 3.02, which is headed ‘Leave of absence’, states:

- (1) Notice will be given of a motion for giving leave of absence to any member, stating the cause and period of absence.

We have now had discussion about the role of the minister, but the Council has not been provided with a reason to satisfy it regarding Mr Somyurek’s failure to attend a sitting of the Council. Merely failing to front up because there are other issues is not, in my view, a reason for his non-attendance. In accordance with the standing orders he or the government must provide a sufficient cause to be stated to the Council in the terms within the standing orders, and if that is not provided, then the Council has within its disposal means to deal with that.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Dalla-Riva raises an important matter. In pure terms he is absolutely correct that that is a current standing order of this place, and therefore it might be expected by the house that that provision be complied with. However, this house has as a matter of practice undertaken a position in the past where members have not been formally required to seek a leave of absence if it is related to, particularly, illness. There have been a number of instances where members on both sides of the house have been absent from Parliament due to illness and they have not triggered this particular point of order. Therefore to accept that that is valid, provided that a member essentially meets that criteria, it is a consistent approach by the house.

I have not had an opportunity to speak to Mr Somyurek. I have read in the media that he has taken leave on the basis of illness. I can only act upon that information at this time because I have not been provided with any information to the contrary. I would hope that is the case, because I would not want to see a situation going forward where a member who was under some pressure for whatever reason simply did not come to the house on the basis that they were not prepared to be scrutinised by the house for whatever reason. To me that would be a contempt of the processes of the house and a contempt of the house itself. On this occasion, as I understand it, Mr Somyurek is ill. I accept that in good faith. I thank Mr Dalla-Riva for the point of order, though, and it was a valid point of order.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. When did the minister first become aware of allegations of verbal or physical abuse by the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Mr Somyurek, to his staff?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Ms Wooldridge for her question. Without necessarily accepting the description of the complaints that have been raised by the chief of staff of Mr Somyurek, those complaints were raised with the Premier's office on Thursday afternoon. I became aware of them on Thursday evening. I had discussions with the Premier's office that in fact late on Thursday evening there was a request of the Department of Premier and Cabinet to provide the Premier with advice on these matters the following day. That led to advice, on the basis of its inquiries, being provided by the department to the Premier by close of business on Friday, which then led to a conversation between the Premier and the minister on Saturday morning. At all steps through that process I was aware of how that was being considered — that advice was being prepared and the process was being undertaken.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the Leader of the Government. Can he clarify when he first discussed these allegations with the Premier?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I think if the member was listening to my response, she may have heard that it was on Thursday evening.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JENNINGS — No, I think you may actually discover when you read *Hansard* that I discussed it with the Premier on Thursday evening as well.

Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is again to the Leader of the Government. This question goes to the issue of what a minister being stood down actually means. Can the minister advise whether Minister Somyurek continues to be paid as a minister?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I can confirm that until further notice and until a further determination, the minister standing aside and there being acting arrangements in place mean that the minister continues to be paid as, in office, a minister of the Victorian government.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the Leader of the Government for his frank response to my question. Can the Leader of the Government also advise whether Minister Somyurek still has access to his ministerial office at 121 Exhibition Street?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Without necessarily following Mr Somyurek in terms of his travels in the last 48 hours, there is a level of understanding from the minister and an expectation that he will not be using his ministerial office or, for that matter, his ministerial car during the investigation that is currently being undertaken.

Ministerial code of conduct

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is also to the Leader of the Government. Can the minister outline the requirements in the ministerial code of conduct regarding bullying and intimidatory behaviour?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The expectation of appropriate ministerial behaviour is that ministers treat all citizens and all their obligations with respect and regard. In fact that is a benchmark that has been measured by the appropriate behaviour of not only

ministers but all members of the government. We would expect them to comply with any obligations in relation to safe workplaces and the harmonious relationships that they maintain in the course of their duties and indeed treating with respect all those they work with and come in contact with.

Supplementary question

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his response. Can the minister advise whether Minister Somyurek has signed the code of conduct acknowledging his responsibility as outlined by the Leader of the Government?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The member who has asked the question may know, as he was previously a minister, that the existence of the code of conduct is not dependent upon whether any individual signs it.

Workplace bullying

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. I ask this question as both an MP and the founding chairman of Bully Zero Australia Foundation. I ask the Leader of the Government: what procedures and training has the government provided to ministers and ministerial staff to identify, report and stop bullying in their offices?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — In terms of the expectations I have outlined to the house in my previous answers about the way in which any minister or staff of a minister's office may maintain harmonious, respectful relationships with the Victorian community, I believe all of those in the employ of the government are well aware of our obligations under Victorian law and what would be expected of us, either through codes of conduct or appropriate workplace behaviour. It has not been drawn to the government's attention that there needs to be any particular additional remedial support provided across the Victorian government, but we will reflect on that need, and if, after reflection on that need, we need to embark upon an elevated program of information and support, we will do so.

Supplementary question

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I acknowledge the Leader of the Government's abhorrence of workplace bullying, as I have it as well. Of the Leader of the Government I ask: how many notifications of alleged workplace bullying or

intimidation have been received by the Premier's office since coming to government?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Again, for the second time in this question time, I do not necessarily accept the description of the behaviour that has led to this investigation. I do not accept the description — —

Ms Wooldridge interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I do not accept any inflammatory description of these matters. But I can confirm that investigations were undertaken in relation to behaviours, and if those behaviours are proved and the investigation warrants further action to be taken, then it will be taken. But at no stage until then am I in a position to confirm the nature as described by the member in his question.

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, President, my supplementary question was very specific. It drew no parallel to any other incident, and if the minister chooses to draw that parallel, that is his business. I asked very specifically: how many notifications had the Premier's office had about bullying or intimidation? It just has to be a number.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will take consideration of that.

Mr JENNINGS — I can answer that. The description I reject. In relation to complaints in relation to inappropriate behaviour, this is the first.

Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question again is to the Leader of the Government. Media reports indicate that one of Minister Somyurek's staff was sacked last Wednesday night as a result of an argument in the ministerial office. Is it not a fact that Minister Somyurek sacked the staff member because the staff member witnessed and tried to intervene in one of the alleged bullying incidents?

Ms Shing — On a point of order, President, Ms Wooldridge is asking for an answer to a statement which she, firstly, asserts as being fact and which, secondly, is the subject of an investigation. I would have thought that in the interests of making sure that procedural fairness is afforded to all parties to this matter that it be allowed to be discharged within the course of the investigation and the inquiry itself and that it not form part of what is descending into a completely inappropriate fracas, in my view.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will come back to the question.

Shooting Sports Facilities program

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Special Minister of State, Mr Jennings, representing the Minister for Sport. Recently there has been some doubt cast about the future of the Shooting Sports Facilities program. Can the minister inform the house of the status of the Shooting Sports Facilities program?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I feel a little bit stunned by the nature of this question and Mr Bourman's hope I may be able to answer this question. I am currently unable to because of a gap in my knowledge base, and I will attempt to remedy that and provide the answer to the member at the earliest opportunity.

Supplementary question

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — In the context I know that the minister will not be able to answer this. Can the minister update the house on when we can expect the next round of grants to be open for that program?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I am sorry that I have failed Mr Bourman on both his substantive question and the supplementary. I will endeavour to get that information to him at the earliest opportunity.

Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade

The PRESIDENT — Order! I return to Ms Wooldridge's question, and I thank her for the courtesy of giving me the opportunity to read that question. As members will assume from my hesitation, I have some concerns in respect of the fact that there is a process underway. Ms Shing has referred to that in her point of order. There is a process underway, and I do not think we ought to be pre-empting the outcome of that process. In listening to and reading the question, I am able to call the minister to answer the question, but I must say I am not sure that it is even within his knowledge to be able to answer that question in its own way. It is certainly a matter that would be part of the process that has been put in place by the Premier. Nonetheless, I am prepared to call the minister.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — What I can say is that the member is in no way able to form the conclusion that the issue she has raised with me is a

fact, and I can certainly confirm that I am not in a position to confirm that it is a fact.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the Leader of the Government. I ask: why has the government not immediately reinstated the staff member who was sacked for doing the right thing?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will let the minister discharge it. There is an insinuation in the way that the last part of the question reads that I am not sure is fair in terms of the standing of this matter, but I will let the minister respond to the supplementary question.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — For the third occasion, what the member alleges as fact she is not in a position to be able to assert as fact, and I am not in a position to confirm that it is a fact either.

East Gippsland timber industry

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. I refer to media reports regarding the prosecution of members of the community group in East Gippsland which recently exposed allegations of illegal harvesting of protected native forests on the Errinundra Plateau. The dedicated members of the Goongerah Environment Centre have an established record of peacefully observing the activities of VicForests employees and contractors and of bringing to light potential breaches of Victorian laws that protect high conservation value native forests. These local community members are undertaking duties which are clearly in the public interest. The government's investigation of the environment centre's recent allegations found that VicForests was culpable for the unwarranted destruction of 22 rainforest canopy trees. This would not have come to public attention without the efforts of the Goongerah Environment Centre. My question is: is the minister aware that the members of this community group are being investigated for merely observing and recording VicForests destruction of protected trees, and will the minister exercise a discretion to not prosecute in the circumstances?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the member for her question. Ms Dunn makes a number of assertions in posing her question that I am inclined to disagree with, and for the benefit of the house I can take members, including Ms Dunn, through the events that have occurred and that she refers to.

There was an immediate investigation undertaken after claims of illegal logging. The Department of

Environment, Land, Water and Planning found that VicForests fully complied with the code for two of the three allegations by protecting an identified area of rainforest and ensuring no impact on waterways. In the third matter, in relation to the allegation of harvesting rainforest, investigators were unable to conclusively determine whether VicForests was compliant with the code due to the small size of the area and the level of disturbance, but I have responded to similar questions on this matter in the past. The department did consider that the pushing over and felling of some trees in the impacted area was unnecessary. In two instances VicForests has been found to fully comply, and in a third the investigation was inconclusive.

In response to the specific question about an investigation underway, what I would say is that permission from VicForests can be sought by members of the public to enter timber harvesting safety zones. This will be the case in the future, and VicForests will consider such applications as they are presented to it. But timber harvesting safety zones are an important protection. This is heavy and dangerous work, and the protection of people who work in the timber industry, and indeed the protection of people who do not like the timber industry, is important.

I can advise the house that the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources forestry compliance officers are currently investigating an alleged breach of the timber harvesting safety zones, and I believe that this is entirely appropriate.

Supplementary question

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — For the benefit of members, that timber harvesting compliance unit report stated:

VicForests retains a degree of culpability ...

The unwarranted destruction of these trees is not considered —

by the timber harvesting compliance unit —

to be consistent with 'best practice' ...

for native timber harvesting operations. My supplementary question is: how is the public interest in pursuing this prosecution outweighed by the public interest in exposing illegal activity by VicForests?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — As I have indicated to the house on previous occasions, and as Ms Dunn points out, VicForests was found to be short of best practice and improvements are being made, but the investigators were unable to conclusively

determine whether VicForests had or had not been compliant with the code, so we have an investigation that is inconclusive.

In response to the investigation into entering a timber harvesting zone without authorisation, these rules exist to protect people, to keep people safe, and when the rules are not complied with it is entirely appropriate that an investigation is undertaken. We have a responsibility to ensure the safety of people who are in areas where timber harvesting is being undertaken. I understand that some members in this place would very much prefer that we do not have a timber industry in the state, but on that we will not agree.

VicForests logging coupes

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. I refer to the recent investigation report of allegations of illegal harvesting of rainforest in the Errinundra Plateau. The report is dated 23 April 2015 and was prepared by officers of the timber harvesting compliance unit of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. The report found that 22 rainforest canopy trees had been needlessly destroyed in early April 2015 and that VicForests was culpable for their destruction. These trees included southern sassafras, black oliveberry, Gippsland waratah and banyalla trees. In fact the investigation found that VicForests had no plans to use the felled rainforest canopy trees for specialty timber purposes. The investigation did not identify sufficient evidence to prosecute VicForests, but this was mainly because the offences require proof beyond reasonable doubt that the pre-existing rainforest areas exceeded the threshold. My question is: what follow-up action will be taken to ensure that the needless destruction of protected rainforest does not recur?

Mr Dalidakis — On a point of order, President, I acknowledge that the member used the words 'alleged illegal activity', and I ask that Hansard change the rest of her questions to use the word 'alleged', because no illegal activity has in fact been found.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is not a point of order; it is a point of debate. I am sure the minister is cognisant of the issue you have just raised and is more than competent to address that matter. Certainly we do not go around correcting each other's questions and answers, thankfully.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — As I indicated in my answers to earlier questions from Ms Dunn, the investigation in relation to this matter was inconclusive, so the member is asking for action in

response to her assertion that the investigation was conclusive when in fact it was not.

Supplementary question

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — It is fair to say that the evidence was inconclusive because the evidence was that the trees had been clear-felled. My supplementary question is: will the minister ensure that VicForests and its contractors are subject to spot checks for compliance with the industry code, and what will be the arrangements for this in terms of the qualifications and independence of these spot checkers?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — The timber industry in Victoria provides employment to 21 000 people in this state. It produces a wide range of products, and the value of the timber industry to many towns, particularly in the eastern part of state but also in south-western Victoria to a smaller degree but not an insignificant degree, cannot be overstated. I understand the Greens are hell-bent on ending the timber industry in Victoria, but this government is committed to a sustainable timber industry in Victoria. It is my expectation and the government's expectation that VicForests operates in a way that is consistent with world's best practice, and it is my belief that it does. I know there are members in this place who would like to see no timber industry in Victoria, but on that we will not agree.

Broadmeadows railway station

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Public Transport. The Broadmeadows train station has required urgent works for some years. The previous government cancelled the planned upgrade in what many saw as a desperate attempt to satisfy former MP Geoff Shaw by diverting the funds to Frankston instead. At the time the now Premier described the backflip as a slap in the face for families living in the state's key growth areas, and local MP Frank McGuire, the member for Broadmeadows in the Assembly, called it a 'reverse Robin Hood'. Now in power, the budget recently handed down does not allocate a single penny for the Broadmeadows station redevelopment. My question is: when will the government commit to the much-needed redevelopment of the station by putting back into the budget the \$30 million that was previously earmarked for this project?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Ms Patten for her question. As members are well aware, the budget was delivered three weeks ago by the Treasurer, Tim Pallas. The government's focus in

shaping its first budget was on delivering on each and every one of its election commitments. My colleague Ms Allan has a power of work to do on Melbourne's public transport system and indeed Victoria's public transport system, and she is tackling that work at a great pace.

On the very specific nature of Ms Patten's question, I will take that on notice and seek a response from the Minister for Public Transport.

Supplementary question

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I am concerned that in that answer we are now looking at a reverse Robin Hood backflip, but my question is: if the government will not commit funding to the Broadmeadows train station, why has the government broken this promise to the electorate?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Ms Patten for her supplementary question. I will take that on notice.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I indicate that out of today's questions Ms Pulford will provide a response on both Ms Patten's substantive and supplementary question.

I also indicate that Mr Bourman has written to me in respect of a written response provided by the Minister for Training and Skills in his capacity as representing the Minister for Police in the Council. It was a response to Mr Bourman's question without notice and supplementary question raised on 15 April. Mr Bourman had three concerns: firstly, that parts of the answer provided were incorrect; secondly, that his question was recorded incorrectly; and thirdly, that no answer was given to part of his question.

I have reviewed the answer provided by the minister. In respect of the accuracy of the answer provided by the minister, this is not a matter I can judge and in fact may well be a matter of debate rather than of substance. Under sessional order 5 I can only determine the appropriateness of a written response in terms of its relevance, not its accuracy.

In respect of the question being recorded incorrectly, I have consulted Hansard's final published version of the question, and it matches the question as recorded by the minister in his response.

Finally, in respect of Mr Bourman's concern that part of the question was not answered, specifically in relation to the second part of the member's supplementary question, which asked:

... how many actual crimes of violence for which the registry has been used to solve these crimes?

I am of the view that this part of the supplementary question was not answered at all in the minister's response; therefore I direct that the matter be returned via the Minister for Training and Skills to the responsible minister so that a further written response might be provided specifically addressing the second portion of that supplementary question.

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, President, I refer to the point of order I raised at the end of question time on Wednesday, 6 May. It was in relation to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade not providing a fulsome written answer to my question regarding the 2015 Easter Sunday public holiday. President, your directive on 6 May indicated that you were of a mind that it would be possible to provide a fairly reliable estimate of what the cost had been, and you directed the minister to provide an answer within 48 hours of that day. I am conscious of the fact that the Premier is now assuming the role of the minister for small business and that matters of administration are a matter for government, but 20 days have gone past and no written answer has been received.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I note that the member is correct and that I have also not been furnished with an answer to that question to satisfy that direction. I do not know if the Leader of the Government at this point has any comment on that position.

Mr Jennings — President, I am in the hands of the house. If the house seeks that answer from me, I will make sure that an answer is provided.

The PRESIDENT — Order! If Mr Jennings could follow up the matter on behalf of the house, I would appreciate that. Given that there has no doubt been some work done on this already, if it were possible to furnish it tomorrow, I would appreciate that. To summarise, I hope Mr Jennings will be able to provide the answer to the question from Mr Ondarchie within a day and that Mr Herbert will be able to provide an answer within 48 hours.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I have written answers to the following questions on notice: 471, 494–501, 511–15, 519, 521, 527–9, 531–6, 540, 553.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Northern Victoria Region

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Premier, and it is regarding food procurement for Victorian government departments. My constituents have raised the issue of food procurement by Victorian government departments — particularly the Department of Health and Human Services — and the fact that there is no preference given to Victorian-grown and Victorian-produced food.

As the Premier knows, Victoria grows some of the cleanest, greenest, highest quality food in the world. The Victorian government, through the department of health and other departments, has a large food consumer base. Often government departments purchase imported product that is not of the same standard as Victorian-grown products. Victorian-grown food might cost a little more, but the initial outlay would also be offset by employment, payroll tax, GST and other benefits. As a regional member with a strong interest in the success and future of regional communities and food production, I ask the Premier if he is prepared to conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis and regulatory impact statement to establish the benefit of implementing a policy stipulating the procurement of Victorian-produced food by Victorian government departments.

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency matter responds to community concerns about delays in construction of a crucial cycling link in the east of Melbourne. The Heatherdale to Syndal bike track is currently a muddy track that runs along a 9-kilometre linear reserve through Mitcham, Forest Hill, Burwood East and Glen Waverley. It links a number of railway stations, shopping centres, schools, Monash University and community sporting facilities. The construction of a proper shared track here would be a great opportunity to invest in sensible, cost-effective infrastructure. The project has the full support of the City of Whitehorse and the City of Monash. The construction of a sealed path along this route would be a great incentive for people in the east of Melbourne to take the healthy and sustainable option of travelling by bike, which will ease pressure on public transport and reduce road congestion. Will the government contribute funding towards this terrific project?

Eastern Victoria Region

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Local Government. Four of the 10 interface councils are in Eastern Victoria Region. Together they cover a population base of well over half a million people. They have all welcomed the commitment of \$50 million in the recent budget to the Interface Councils Infrastructure Fund. I ask that the minister clarify how the guidelines for the allocation of funds from the interface fund will ensure that the projects benefiting from the fund achieve optimal outcomes for the community. Over recent weeks I have had the benefit of visiting many interface councils in my electorate with the minister and have been very impressed with the potential projects that are already in the advanced stages of planning.

Eastern Victoria Region

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My constituency matter is for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It concerns the part of the Nepean Highway between Peninsula Link and Craigie Road in Mount Martha. Regrettably there has been a fatality in recent times at the intersection of Forest Drive and the Nepean Highway. There have been several casualties from crashes at the intersection of Uralla Road and the Nepean Highway, as well as other safety concerns on that strip of what can be a very busy road.

Several constituents have raised concerns with me about the safety of this part of the Nepean Highway. In recent times VicRoads has dropped the speed limit in part of that area from 100 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour in recognition of some of those safety concerns. But clearly what is required are some engineering solutions and improved road treatments for that part of the road. I ask the minister to address that issue.

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Health and relates to the current negotiation between the government and the City of Greater Geelong to find a suitable site for the Barwon Health North facility. Barwon Health North was a \$28 million budget commitment made by the then Victorian coalition government in May last year. This healthcare service in North Geelong was strongly pursued by my parliamentary colleague David Koch, a former member for Western Victoria Region, in the last term of the

previous government, and the then Minister for Health, David Davis. This fully funded healthcare service is at the point of finding a suitable land site. I would like to know if the government will be successful in having the land gifted from the City of Greater Geelong so the budget allocated to purchase land can be used to further upgrade the facility to provide even better health services for the community of North Geelong. I also invite the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Bulleen in the Legislative Assembly, to meet with the mayor, Darryn Lyons, to discuss this matter when he is next in Geelong.

Eastern Victoria Region

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Agriculture, Ms Jaala Pulford, and I ask: why does the RSPCA get \$5 million for combatting illegal puppy farms but there is no money for aerial baiting and no money for the wild dog bounty to help deal with the wild dog problem in Gippsland?

Western Victoria Region

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My question is directed to the Minister for Education and relates to the election commitment Labor made to build a new technical school in Ballarat. I note in the budget that there is a mere \$8 million allocated to the technical schools program over the next three financial years. These inadequate funds have apparently been allocated to realise the opening of 10 technical schools across the state — a mere \$800 000 per school. The minister was quoted in the Ballarat *Courier* recently as saying:

We want to see construction start as soon as possible and have our tech schools opening in 2017–18.

Can the minister confirm that the Ballarat technical school will open in the 2017–18 financial year?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport. As the minister would be aware, there is a long-running saga involving the removal of the Main Road level crossing in St Albans. To my knowledge, Labor first promised to remove this level crossing back in 1982. That is 33 years and eight Premiers ago — perhaps nine coming up. The coalition government allocated funding for this project last year, and locals assumed that this killer crossing would soon be gone. Now we hear from within the government that works on the St Albans crossing are on hold and the money is being diverted to the other side of Melbourne. Will the

minister confirm or deny that Labor has again shafted the people of St Albans?

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. Recently all of the water authority board members were sacked. The argument given was that the government wanted to increase the number of women and people from culturally diverse backgrounds on these boards. That seems quite ironic given that a number of very good and capable women and people from multicultural backgrounds were sacked. That is not to reflect on the high calibre of board members across the state.

The other reason the government gave was that it wanted to appoint board members who were more sympathetic to climate change adaptation. In relation to the appointment of board members to South East Water and Melbourne Water, which service my constituency, I ask the minister to outline what processes have been put in place to source the new board members and what key performance indicators are being used in order to do so. I ask the minister to confirm whether former Deputy Premier John Thwaites and Australian Workers Union staffer and former Labor candidate Robyn McLeod have been appointed to pick new board members for all of the state's water boards, including South East Water.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Education and is with regard to portable classrooms at Port Melbourne Primary School. The school has had a big increase in enrolments. In 2006 it had 173 students, today it has 720, and enrolments will keep growing by at least 50 students a year. The school site is landlocked and the children use a local park to increase their play space. Last week the minister said he was unable to provide a proposed opening date for a new primary school in South Melbourne.

The presence of asbestos in Port Melbourne Primary School's portables has alarmed parents. This included asbestos in the damaged floor of the entrance to a portable that children walked on every day. This was removed last Friday but further work is urgently needed. It makes sense to replace the single-storey portables with double-storey ones as a short-term response to the school's space and health needs. I ask the minister to commit to immediately replacing the

four single-storey portables at Port Melbourne primary with three double-storey relocatable classrooms.

ALCOA (PORTLAND ALUMINIUM SMELTER) (AMENDMENT) ACT AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Alcoa (Portland Aluminium Smelter) (Amendment) Act 1984 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

SUPREME COURT OF VICTORIA

Report 2013–14

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) presented report by command of the Governor.

Laid on table.

VICTORIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION

Photographing and filming tenants' possessions for advertising purposes

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills), by leave, presented report.

Laid on table.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 5

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) presented *Alert Digest No. 5* of 2015, including appendices.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be published.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003 — Government response to the State of the Environment Report 2013.

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 —

Minister's Order of 23 March 2015 giving approval to the granting of a license and a lease at Albert Park Reserve.

Minister's Order of 23 April 2015 giving approval to the granting of a lease at National Rhododendron Gardens Reserve.

Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986 — Minister's Certificate of 20 May 2015 pursuant to section 7(4) of the Act.

Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the year ended 31 October 2014.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of Approval of the following amendments to planning schemes —

Banyule Planning Scheme — Amendment C103.

Boroondara Planning Scheme — Amendments C205 and C211.

Brimbank Planning Scheme — Amendments C156 and C171 (Part 1).

Buloke Planning Scheme — Amendment C18.

Darebin Planning Scheme — Amendments C122 and C127.

Frankston Planning Scheme — Amendments C101 and C107.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme — Amendment C138.

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme — Amendment C210.

Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme — Amendment C185.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — Amendment C297.

Hume Planning Scheme — Amendment C150.

Latrobe Planning Scheme — Amendment C83.

Mildura Planning Scheme — Amendment C81.

Mitchell Planning Scheme — Amendment C91 (Part 1).

Moonee Valley Planning Scheme — Amendment C142.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme — Amendment C151.

Nillumbik Planning Scheme — Amendment C94.

Stonnington Planning Scheme — Amendments C208 (Part 1) and C209.

Wangaratta Planning Scheme — Amendment C45.

Whitehorse Planning Scheme — Amendment C171.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme — Amendments C153, C174, C189 and C190.

Wyndham Planning Scheme — Amendment C208.

Yarra Planning Scheme — Amendment C138.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendment C136.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament —

County Court Act 1958 — Nos. 34 and 35.

Magistrates' Court Act 1989 — No. 32.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — No. 33.

Supreme Court Act 1986 — No. 30.

Supreme Court Act 1986 — Civil Procedure Act 2010 — No. 29.

Transfer of Land Act 1958 — No. 36.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal 1998 — No. 37.

Wrongs Act 1958 — No. 31.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 31, 32, 34 to 37.

Legislative Instruments and related documents under section 16B in respect of —

New taxi-cab licences: notification of annual licence fees to apply from 1 January 2015, 24 April 2015, under the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983.

Southern Metropolitan Cemetery Trust Scale of Fees and Charges effective as of 30 April 2015 under the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003.

Southern Metropolitan Cemetery Trust Scale of Fees and Charges effective as of 5 May 2015 under the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

General business

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — By leave, I move:

That precedence be given to the following general business on Wednesday, 27 May 2015:

- (1) order of the day standing in the name of Mr Barber to move the second reading of the Alcoa (Portland Aluminium Smelter) (Amendment) Act Amendment Bill 2015;
- (2) notice of motion given this day standing in the name of Ms Wooldridge referring various matters to Legislative Council standing committees;
- (3) notice of motion given this day standing in the name of Mr Barber referring a matter to the economy and infrastructure standing committee;

- (4) notice of motion 101 standing in the name of Mr Rich-Phillips in relation to the failure of the government to produce various documents; and
- (5) notice of motion 115 standing in the name of Ms Wooldridge referring a matter to the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS

National Sorry Day

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — Today is a day of national significance and a day of national sorrow. National Sorry Day publicly recognises the impact of past policies that forcibly removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. It is not widely known that Victoria was impacted more significantly than other states, with a higher percentage of children removed than in other states and territories. It is a sad truth that many of the children in the out-of-home care system today are grandchildren of those people who were removed.

That is one of the reasons we are supporting the work of Andrew Jackomos, the commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people, in Taskforce 1000, which aims to review the status of the more than 1000 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in Victoria. We know that as well as being over-represented in out-of-home care, Aboriginal children are under-represented in early years services such as three-year-old and four-year-old kindergarten. This is why I have begun a program to encourage Aboriginal parents to enrol their young children in kindergarten. Even at this stage of the school year, it is not too late. In addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, in March when I announced \$43 million for targeted care packages to move children from residential to home-based care I stressed that a priority is to focus on moving Aboriginal children into home environments.

Further to this, the recent Victorian budget provided \$283 million for services for all vulnerable children and families, and Aboriginal families will be beneficiaries of this additional funding. The budget also allocated \$1.75 million to directly improve supports for vulnerable Aboriginal families and children. This funding will be used to create eight specialist positions for 12 months to oversee the implementation of area action plans being formed in response to issues identified through Taskforce 1000. The funding will also be used to review existing programs that assist

vulnerable Aboriginal families, in close consultation with Aboriginal families. It is important that we learn from the mistakes of the past.

Today I am wearing this commemorative silk flower, which was created as a national emblem of the stolen generations. This flower was adopted because it is found widely across Australia and is a survivor. Its purple colour denotes compassion and spiritual healing, and that is what we wish for all members of the stolen generations.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Regional and rural health

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to raise awareness about how the Labor government has snubbed health in regional and rural Victoria as part of this last budget. In fact less than 4 per cent of new hospital capital funding is for facilities in rural and regional Victoria.

Of even greater concern is the cutting of two vital capital infrastructure projects: the Rural Capital Support Fund and the Bush Nursing Support Fund. These projects provided vital funding for our public and regional health services, our registered community health services and our bush nursing centres and hospitals to enable them to undertake some basic infrastructure capital programs such as small construction and remodelling projects; essential IT upgrades, including wi-fi installation; and energy and water efficiency projects. The Rural Capital Support Fund provided \$56 million over four years while the Bush Nursing Support Fund comprised \$2.2 million over four years, and both of them have been cut by the Andrews Labor government.

Having visited rural and regional health services many times, including some significant visits over the last week with my colleagues Ms Fitzherbert and the member for Ripon in the Legislative Assembly, I know that the health services are aghast at the prospect of not having capital support funds to address the basic capital infrastructure needs of rural health services. The Andrews government is to be condemned for its failure to support rural and regional health.

National Sorry Day

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to speak on National Sorry Day. This is the 17th National Sorry Day, and I am sad that, although some progress has been made on Indigenous issues since the first sorry day, the story is still not good. Since 1998 there have

been good symbols and important symbolic actions taken, including Kevin Rudd's apology to the stolen generations, but that was over eight years ago, and while symbols are important, real action is most important. I am utterly appalled by the Abbott federal government using \$90 million to try to close 150 remote Indigenous communities in Western Australia. This is totally unacceptable. The first nations people have suffered not only from the overt wrongs of dispossession, disease and undeclared warfare over the last two centuries but also from meddling and quite often wrongheaded attempts to right these wrongs.

The *Bringing Them Home* report was stark about the intergenerational damage done to Indigenous people and Indigenous culture. No matter how well-intentioned some of these actions may have been, they were wrong. We can look back today and say they were racist, but whether they were wrong or racist, one thing is for sure — that is, we did not involve Indigenous Australians in the decision-making about their welfare and their future. That is why we need to start a conversation about self-determination. I hope today's National Sorry Day can be marked not just by symbols but by serious intention to move towards constitutional recognition and self-determination. After two centuries of white settlement, it is certainly overdue.

Gippsland infrastructure projects

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — Prior to the 2010 election the coalition committed to two significant infrastructure projects for the West Gippsland and South Gippsland communities. The first was the upgrade of the Warragul railway station, including the construction of a new underpass, and I am pleased to say that that project was completed and opened in late March. It is a fantastic \$26 million infrastructure improvement for the Warragul community. The station, which is at the heart of the community, now has 200 additional commuter car parking spaces to reflect the growing number of people commuting from Warragul and district to the metropolitan area.

The other recently opened significant piece of infrastructure for that region is the \$66 million Koo Wee Rup bypass. The bypass was long sought after by the Koo Wee Rup community. For 11 long years Labor ignored their calls, but the then opposition leader, Ted Baillieu, and the then opposition minister, Terry Mulder, listened, and I am very pleased to say that that project has now been completed and opened and will take up to 1000 trucks a day out of the Koo Wee Rup community. This will free up access, particularly on

long weekends, Friday nights and during the summer for people accessing the Monash corridor, travelling along Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road, moving through Koo Wee Rup and going down to South Gippsland, Phillip Island and the Bass Coast. These are two very important pieces of infrastructure for the West Gippsland and South Gippsland communities, and they have been delivered by the coalition.

Madeleine Sobb

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I make this statement on behalf of the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS), and it is a sad announcement about youth and disability activist Madeleine Sobb. On Friday, 22 May, we sadly lost our beloved friend and colleague Madeleine after a short illness. Madeleine joined the Youth Disability Advocacy Service steering committee in 2011 and headed up the first ever National Youth Disability Conference in 2012 as the conference coordinator. This was a massive endeavour, and it demonstrated her impressive talents and passion for raising youth and disability issues at a national level.

In 2014 Madeleine commenced her role as a YDAS project officer at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and completed her bachelor of applied science in disability. In 2014 she headed up the protest against the axing of ABC Ramp Up, which is where I first met her. Ramp Up was a national platform for disability news and opinion, which was edited by Madeleine's close personal friend, the late Stella Young. It was an amazing program.

On behalf of the YDAS staff, the steering committee and the Victorian staff and board, our heartfelt condolences go out to her partner, Jarrod; her parents, Tom and Margaret; her sisters; her soon-to-be brother-in-law, Paul; and her many friends, who loved her as we did. I would like to add my personal condolences for an amazing woman.

National Sorry Day

Mr DALIDAKIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise in recognition of National Sorry Day. This day was first marked in 1998, and it gives me great pleasure as both a member of Parliament and a first-generation Australian to have the opportunity to recognise National Sorry Day, not because I am at all happy about the plight of our Indigenous people in this day and age but because, like many other first-generation Australians, I think it is an issue we need to talk about to ensure that Australians from any generation and background are able to understand why we need to

keep working to assist our Indigenous population in looking after themselves, as other speakers have said, in relation to self-determination and other issues.

It would be remiss of me not to recognise the efforts of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on this issue, particularly his apology to the stolen generations in 2008. I also recognise former Prime Minister Paul Keating for his great work with our Indigenous community. What we have done in the past is well and good, but we need to keep working for the future. With that in mind, I wish to pay my respects to our Indigenous population.

Agnes Falls Scenic Reserve

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — Today I commend the following people and place to this house. Hidden away in the hills of South Gippsland, the Agnes River reserve is a picturesque tourist attraction. It is situated 160 kilometres east of Melbourne and can be accessed from the towns of Welshpool and Toora.

Mountain streams from the southern slopes of the Strzelecki Ranges find their way into the Agnes River. After heavy rain, the river falls over the rocks into a spectacular cascade creating the Agnes Falls. At 59 metres, these are the highest single-span falls in Victoria. The reserve is a little gem and protects a small remnant of old forest that once covered the area. A canopy of tall eucalypts supports many bird species. Southern blue gums, silver wattles and blackwood grow along the gorge, and the moist conditions support the diversity of understorey, which in turn is a home for the eastern yellow robin. From the car park, a short track leads to a viewing area overlooking the falls.

A passionate group of people, led by Kathy Whelan and Peter Lee, has driven the rejuvenation of the reserve and formed Friends of Agnes Falls. These dedicated people, together with Parks Victoria and the local Landcare organisation, have renewed the picnic area, provided seating along the walk and made the reserve friendly for us to visit and enjoy. I commend their efforts to the house.

Ray Stokie

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — It is with great honour that I rise to speak of one of Port Fairy's most active community volunteers, Ray Stokie. Ray passed away last week after decades of tireless dedication to the Port Fairy community.

Ray was the town postie for many years, and he worked at the post office for 38 years. While raising six children with his wife Lorna, he tirelessly gave his time

to all manner of community activities. He was a life member of the Port Fairy Surf Life Saving Club, playing a crucial role in restarting the club in the 1950s and filling each and every role in the club's executive at one time or another during his more than 50 years of service.

Ray was involved in many other activities as well. He was a volunteer on the Moyneyana Festival committee for more than 50 years, the RSL for more than 40 and he donated his time to Probus, the Port Fairy Folk Festival, the Country Fire Authority, the Lions club and the town's football-netball club.

Ray's dedication to the community was so great that in 2006 he was recognised with a Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the community. Hardworking volunteers like Ray are few and far between, and there is no doubt his contribution to the long list of community groups has enriched the Port Fairy community. I pass on our deepest sympathy to Ray's family.

Bridge Road Children's and Community Centre

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — On Wednesday, 13 May, I attended the opening of the Bridge Road Children's and Community Centre with the Minister for Families and Children, the Honourable Jenny Mikakos; a member for Western Victoria Region, Joshua Morris; the member for Melton in the other place, Don Nardella; and the mayor of Melton, Cr Sophie Ramsey.

The centre is located in the expanding area of Melton South and is much needed by the growing number of families residing in and around this booming suburb. Learning starts from birth, and there is substantial evidence showing the benefits that early learning programs have for children under five years of age. The centre will offer occasional care, maternal and child health care, playgroups and immunisation services. I have no doubt that the 198 kindergarten spaces for four-year-olds and 123 spaces for three-year-olds will be taken advantage of instantly, due to the rapid growth in the number of local families.

The new centre is not just for children; it will also cater for local families and provide quality health and education services in the form of breastfeeding support, parenting programs and a variety of community activities.

The Andrews Labor government has delivered and is still delivering on its promise to invest in education and

provide quality education and health programs closer to home. Another \$50 million is to be invested in the early childhood sector. This will include infrastructure projects to upgrade and restore children's centres to ensure that families in high-growth areas — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Time!

Food Allergy Week

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — Some may ask, 'Why is it that you have one fingernail painted a striking Liberal blue?'. I would answer, 'Thank you for asking. The reason is that last week was Food Allergy Week, and as part of its awareness campaign, people were encouraged to paint one fingernail to symbolise that 1 in 10 children born today will develop a food allergy'.

Food allergies can be life threatening, and it is incredibly important that they be taken seriously. Food allergies are not about liking a particular food, nor are they about having just a little bit of food that you might be allergic to. Anaphylactic reactions that can result from food allergies are very serious episodes which can result in death.

As the father of a child who recently had a late-night trip from Ballarat to the Royal Children's Hospital, I can attest that allergies should be taken very seriously and better understood. It is up to all of us to become more allergy aware, to know how to minimise the risk of an allergic reaction and to know what to do if a reaction happens. A loved one's life could depend on it.

Africa Day

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Africa Day is an annual celebration marking the founding of the Organisation of African Unity — now called the African Union — on 25 May 1963. This symbolic date provides a platform for all Africans across the globe, together with mainstream society, to celebrate Africa's rich cultural diversity and its benefits to multiculturalism and social cohesion.

Many African-Australian community leaders, businesspeople, artists and individuals are making significant contributions to the spiritual, moral, cultural, social and economic lives of their communities and the community at large. This should be celebrated, encouraged and acknowledged.

Over the past three years, Africa Day Melbourne celebrations have steadily grown, with this year's celebrations spanning a week. I was very pleased to be

invited to participate in these events, including the African Day Australia Sports Festival held in Keysborough, which included basketball and soccer tournaments with diaspora teams from across the African continent; Africa's Got Talent in Dandenong, showcasing the best of African-Australian performing artists; and the Africa Day gala dinner at Docklands.

A big congratulations to Stephen Sibanda, John Bellavance, the organising committee and countless hardworking volunteers on an enormously successful Africa Day festival.

As the mother of two children with African heritage and as a former resident of Tanzania, I welcome the growing bond between Australian and African communities that is strengthened every year through this celebration — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Time!

Hare Krishna temple

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — Like you, Acting President, I love multicultural, multifaith Victoria. On Thursday, 21 May, I had the pleasure of joining fantastic local MP Margaret Fitzherbert for a visit to the Hare Krishna ISKCON temple in Albert Park. We were there to see the work that has been undertaken as a result of the coalition government's grant of \$500 000 to help with kitchen renovations. That grant was announced on 22 October by then Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and now Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Matthew Guy, together with Georgie Crozier. Ms Fitzherbert and I were hosted by the wonderful team of Bhakta and Bhakti, who not only showed us exactly what was going on with the kitchen development but also introduced us to many of the devotees who attend the Hare Krishna temple. We were blessed to participate in the devotion that afternoon, including the traditional Annakut.

The Hare Krishna community at the ISKCON temple is a great example of a wonderful community. It is part of the fabric of Melbourne and Victoria. The community is involved in a number of things such as Crossways Food for Life in Swanston Street and, of course, Gopal's restaurant, which has been there for many years. The outreach service to many locals is something to be acknowledged. I thank Ms Fitzherbert for her great work. I acknowledge Ms Crozier and Mr Davis for the work they do in representing the local area. It was a pleasure to attend.

Ulumbarra Theatre

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I was delighted to attend the opening of the Ulumbarra Theatre in Bendigo on the evening of 17 April. The Honourable Damian Drum was there, as was the Minister for Public Transport, Ms Allan, and the member for Bendigo East in the Assembly, Ms Edwards. The theatre replaces the old Bendigo jail complex, and I cannot think of a better way to revitalise the usage of that site. Three tiers of government, together with private and philanthropic donations, funded this magnificent arts and recreation facility, which will give many years of joy to the local community.

Anzac Day

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, on Wednesday, 22 April, I attended the Bundoora RSL for the observance ceremony to commemorate Anzac Day. I was proud to lay a wreath in memory of all our fallen Anzac comrades.

I was also proudly present at the Anzac Day dawn service held at All Nations Park in Northcote, together with the Minister for Women, Ms Richardson. There were many thousands of people in attendance, with a large number of children present. It touched my heart to see the great respect shown by the little ones for the commemoration of their Anzac forefathers.

Bendigo autism walk

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — As I have mentioned before to this house I am thoroughly enjoying my role as shadow parliamentary secretary for autism spectrum disorder. As I travel around the state I meet some of the most inspirational human beings on the planet. Parents, teachers, carers and people with autism show extraordinary courage, compassion and love on a daily basis. They face challenges that would crush most people, but they continue with a strength that is truly awesome, and I mean that in the true sense of the word. Autism awareness is high on their agenda. It is an area that is much needed as the great majority of people have no or little idea of what autism is or what it does.

Last weekend I attended an event in Bendigo, a 24-hour walk for autism. It was very pleasant in Gateway Park in the sunshine on Saturday afternoon, but I suspect it might not have been quite so pleasant some hours later when darkness set in, to say nothing of the temperature at 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the morning. It can be a bit chilly then, and I am sure Mr Drum will back me up on

that. Nonetheless, the walk continued through the night until 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. I offer my very warmest congratulations to all involved. In particular I congratulate the chief organiser, Daniel Giles, a young man on the spectrum himself. His effort is one he can be very proud of, and I believe he is owed all of our congratulations.

Christine Cox Trailblazer Award

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — Last week I had the great privilege of speaking at the Central Ranges local learning and employment network (LLEN) annual general meeting and presenting the Christine Cox Trailblazer Award to Buffy Leadbeater, the coordinator of youth services at the Mitchell Shire Council.

I thank my colleague the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, for saving the LLENs by providing much-needed funding in the recent budget, fulfilling our election commitment. This gives certainty to the 31 LLENs around the state that they may continue to support young people by improving their participation and engagement in education, training and employment opportunities in their local areas.

The trailblazer award was created to recognise a person who has performed outstanding work to increase education and training opportunities for young people across the Macedon Ranges, Mitchell and Murrindindi shires. Christine Cox was a founding board member of the Central Ranges LLEN who devoted her working life to furthering educational opportunities for the local youth in her community. Her dedication and commitment was exceptional, and the region is poorer for her passing in 2012. To honour her memory the trailblazer award was renamed the Christine Cox Trailblazer Award.

I was delighted to present the award to Buffy, a trailblazer herself. Buffy has shown a great commitment to innovation through establishing Mitchell youth rooms, collaborating through her work with a range of organisations and young people, and going above and beyond the call of duty to make a difference in the lives of local young people.

85 Spring Street

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter today concerns the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on 15 May at which the Minister for Planning, Mr Wynne, appeared. At that hearing a series of questions were asked about the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and its influence on 85 Spring Street. I

expressed my extreme concern at the closure of the option for the minister to provide a full explanation, and I sought the minutes of a meeting on 12 February when the CFMEU was present with Minister Wynne's chief of staff and the deputy secretary of his department, Christine Wyatt.

At that meeting clearly the matter of 85 Spring Street was discussed. The minutes should be released in full to the community. The matter of donations to Labor by the CFMEU and its involvement in the election campaign makes this smell to high heaven. A decision was made, obviously by the minister, to close down options for a particular site, and the reasons for that decision are not clear and transparent to the community. I know the minister has given a commitment to improve transparency and accountability, and he did that in the earlier part of his presentation at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I have to say though that the involvement of the CFMEU in influencing decision-making on that site is something that should concern the community greatly.

Ms Mikakos — On a point of order, Acting President, the member has made some very serious allegations in this place in respect of a minister, assertions that he can only make through a substantive motion and not through a members statement. I draw this matter to your attention, Acting President, and I ask you to ask the member to withdraw the assertion he has just made.

Mr DAVIS — On the point of order, Acting President, the community has a right to have this made very clear — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! That is not a point of order. The point of order was that Mr Davis made an allegation, and that he should withdraw it. There are other things he can do if he wants to attack a minister, but if he has not attacked him, then I would like some more clarification for the house.

Mr DAVIS — To the extent that I have made an allegation, I withdraw. The point is that I seek the release of that information.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! Thank you; it is dealt with. Is the member finished? He has 3 seconds remaining.

Mr DAVIS — I seek the release of that information, the notes of the meeting. I think it is pertinent that the community sees it.

Mr Melhem — On a point of order, Acting President, asking the minister to take action is a matter for the adjournment debate; it is not appropriate as a members statement.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! There is no point of order.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA AMENDMENT (JOBS AND INFRASTRUCTURE) BILL 2015

Second reading

Debate resumed from 7 May; motion of Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children).

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — It is a great privilege to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015 because it gives those in the coalition a golden opportunity to reflect on the Regional Growth Fund, which the new Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is going to replace. It gives us all an opportunity to look back at the amount of money that was put into the Regional Growth Fund over an eight-year period. The commitment was to spend \$1 billion over eight years, a phenomenal amount of money. But it was not just that, it was the structure and the set-up surrounding the fund that I think will be well remembered into the future.

I also think it is worth comparing governments. The way the current Labor government is working through its regional development portfolio at the moment, there has effectively been an absolute freeze on any action for six months. The Labor government has been in power for six months and all that has happened in relation to regional development is a review. The government has brought in John Brumby, a former Premier who is well credentialled in the regional development field, having been a regional development minister for many years, to do a review. But you cannot just have a state on stand-by for six months and not have anything happen. You just cannot keep making announcements that, 'We're looking into this' and, 'We're looking into that', 'We're going to do this' and, 'We're interested in this'. You need to start making decisions, but this government is unable to make decisions because it is still waiting for this review to hand down some guidelines and regulation around how this fund is going to be put in place and used.

When you compare this to the actions taken by the former Deputy Premier, Peter Ryan, in relation to the Regional Growth Fund, there is a stark contrast.

Coming into the election in 2010 we had our fund ready to go. We had the guidelines, the various categories and the engagement process ready to go. We picked up the previous government's Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees. Under Labor they were nothing more than advisory committees. They had no power, they had no resources and they had no funding or power to prioritise any projects within their areas.

We took those RDA committees, made up of all Labor Party appointees, from the five regions of regional Victoria and ran with what we had — fantastic people, champions of their respective areas. The RDA committees, complete with their chairs, were given never before seen powers to have a real say in the prioritisation of the projects that were being lobbied for in their respective areas. There was no politics but an effective doubling of the money. We looked at what Labor had to offer at the 2010 election and we effectively doubled the money. We ran towards the election and were lucky enough to win that election and we started work the next day — without the fanfare and all the nice terms from this government about how it is fast-tracking this and fast-tracking that. We started work on the Regional Growth Fund straightaway and were able to start helping and assisting regional communities from our first day in government.

We were able to do that by taking some of those decisions out of government's hands by giving the Regional Development Australia committees the opportunity to veto projects and the opportunity to agree on what projects to put at the top of the list to receive the funding they were applying for. This is something that I believe took a lot of courage. To actually take the politicians out of the process was a very important step in making sure that the very best projects for each of the communities around Victoria were successful, not the ones that a particular politician thought would be good for his or her electorate. We had not seen that courage previously, and we certainly have not seen it in the last six months. It seems as though this Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is going to be totally politicised, with ministers and politicians in the Labor Party having total and extreme right of veto over all the projects that come before them.

Apart from going with the RDAs and giving them this power — this opportunity to have an impact on the various projects — we also took the chairs out of those Regional Development Australia committees and brought them into what we called RPAC, our Regional Policy Advisory Committee. We added some other highly credentialled Victorians to form an advisory committee to the minister. Through the Regional Policy Advisory Committee these people could come together,

look at major projects of state significance and discuss which of these projects were the highest priority not just for their own patch but in terms of offering the best bang for the Victorian taxpayers dollar across the state. Again, that was a piece of work that had never been done by the Labor Party — it had not been done by any of our governments either — and bringing that group together was a very important part of it.

The other aspect I feel proud to have been a part of was the fact that we were able to listen to local councils. We sat down and communicated with each of the 48 councils in regional Victoria. Under Labor 19 rural councils had joined together to form what they called the Whelan group of councils. These councils were in serious financial trouble and could not maintain their assets. They had to undertake a range of actions such as closing local swimming pools and grading bitumen roads back to gravel simply because they were unable to fund the maintenance programs necessary to give their people the facilities and services they needed. We listened to the councils and put in place programs to help them.

Another aspect of undertaking this huge body of work before the election so that we were ready to go once the election took place was working out how to get the best bang for the taxpayers dollar. The value of projects can be measured in an array of ways; it is not just about how you get the best leverage. However, looking back at the end of the four years of the coalition government we were proud of the fact that the \$500 million from our Regional Growth Fund was able to leverage about \$3 of other money for every \$1 in Victorian taxpayers money. To be able to turn \$500 million into \$2 billion worth of investment is something we are very proud of.

It was not just that. The most important thing in the whole concept around our Regional Growth Fund was jobs. Creating 23 000 jobs and consolidating even more jobs because of investment in the regions is something we are incredibly proud of. We created a range of direct and indirect jobs, including construction jobs through the construction stages of many of these projects.

In looking at how we would judge these projects to determine whether they were going to be supported, whether a grant was going to be successful, we developed criteria such as the return in terms of jobs and the ability to leverage other money, whether it was from other governments — federal and/or local — community groups or businesses that were able to contribute so much of their own finance to many of these capital expansions.

Another aspect of it was working out how much community engagement we could have in many of these projects. Again with the Regional Growth Fund, the ability of Regional Development Victoria officers working in the regions to liaise and engage with various community groups on behalf of the government gave us real and practical outcomes. It seems that it was an amazing concoction or mixture of bringing all of this together and working through each of the processes to achieve the outcomes we were after.

To address the first issue — the fact that we had 19 local councils from around Victoria that were on their knees, practically financially unviable, when we came to government — we needed to look at how to assist them to do what they would be expected to do by their constituents, their ratepayers, at the local government level. The Local Government Infrastructure Fund was the first way we were able to address that. We were able to put \$100 million into local councils.

Again, we listened to the councils. More than anything they were frustrated with the application process. Every time they needed a grant they believed they might be eligible for — it might have been for only \$2000, \$3000 or \$5000 — they would have to go through the paperwork of applying for that small grant, and then after a small amount of time they would have to justify what happened with that project and conduct a project analysis. The red tape drove these councils spare to the extent that in many instances they did not apply for grants because the work that had to go on behind the scenes to get the money was sometimes so arduous and time prohibitive that they simply could not be bothered.

Our government listened to the councils and said to them, ‘What we are going to do is give you \$500 000 each year for four years. You will pick the projects that are most important to you. You will tell us and let us know what those projects are. They are simply local government projects that we can help you build for your people. We are going to get the jobs moving’. We got the employment sector up and running because all these toilet blocks, parklands and halls were getting redeveloped. They all involved tradies and workers, and many of them required services to assist councils in delivering for their people in the way that they are expected to.

Until we came to government and introduced the Local Government Infrastructure Fund, they were simply not able to provide for their communities because they did not have the money. Not only did they not have the money but they never had the assurance and security that that money would flow to the tune of \$500 000 for

each of the four years. Then all of a sudden local councils had an income stream over and above their rate base. They knew the quantum of support the government was going to provide them with. They knew that it was coming through. They knew they did not have to apply or justify what they had done with their money. They simply told the government what projects were going to be funded, and the government got out of their road and let them do their work.

That was incredibly popular. It enabled councils to achieve better outcomes because they were able to plan in advance. They could get better tendering results, simply because they knew that everything was set. They did not have to face the risk when they were halfway through a project of getting a phone call saying that funding for a particular grant had been pulled. As a result of the structure the former government set up through the Local Government Infrastructure Fund, that simply was not going to happen.

That was available to all 48 councils throughout regional Victoria, and it was very well received. In the six months the Labor Party has been in government — to this day — it has not spoken one word about what it will do to assist local councils with a fund. Government members can give it a different name if they wish, because they would never dare to use the same name that we used for any of our programs. If they want to give it a different name, that is fine, but first they should tell us how they will support local councils so they can do what is expected of them.

The next aspect of the assistance the former government was able to give communities was the Putting Locals First program. Another \$100 million out of the Regional Growth Fund was allocated to that program. The Putting Locals First program was for projects that had an aspect of regionality about them — projects that were able to draw people in from outside local government and that were slightly larger, and in some cases significantly larger, and had that regional focus.

The Putting Locals First program was an application-style arrangement. Councils were given an informal acknowledgement that, hopefully, over the journey of four years the contribution going to each of the councils would be an amount similar to what they received under the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. The former government also hoped that most of the councils would turn up with an amount somewhere in the vicinity of \$2 million.

This fund started off being a little bit uneven. Many of the larger councils were able to account for their Putting

Locals First applications in a much easier fashion than could some of the smaller councils, because there was a need for matching funds and some smaller councils were struggling to find the matching funds. Some of the criteria associated with Putting Locals First needed to be flexible because some smaller councils were struggling to find projects that had that regionality about them.

The reason I want to go into this detail is that under the leadership of former Minister for Regional and Rural Development and Deputy Premier Peter Ryan the then government, in the middle of its term, was able to listen and create that flexibility. Mr Ryan was able to manoeuvre that fund to make sure that the smaller councils were getting their share. Some of the guidelines around the fund were slightly altered to enable smaller councils to use money from other funds to act as their leverage. This had the result of all the councils being able to get onboard and even more funds being accessed from the Regional Growth Fund to give people the projects they were looking for.

There was \$100 million for the Local Government Infrastructure Fund and another \$100 million for the Putting Locals First program. The next \$100 million I need to talk about was for Energy for the Regions. Going to the election we knew that the Labor Party in government would walk away from regional Victoria in relation to energy and natural gas extensions to communities. Former Premier John Brumby's famous words were that 'any towns that have not got natural gas extensions now will never have it because it is too hard and too difficult'.

Again, former Deputy Premier Peter Ryan took advice from Regional Development Victoria, and the then government made the pledge that 13 additional towns throughout Victoria would be put onto a priority list, and it set about getting natural gas connections to the communities of those 13 priority towns. We were able to deliver seven of those communities natural gas through the conventional method. The remaining six were bundled in with a range of communities from along the Murray River, who were to also receive some money from Simon Crean when he was a federal government regional development minister.

Those collective moneys will see another group of towns along the Murray River receive natural gas for the first time ever. The Brumby government believed that it was simply too hard or impossible to deliver natural gas to places like Robinvale, Swan Hill, Kerang and Nathalia. However, because of the tenacity and the persistence of Peter Ryan and The Nationals-Liberal coalition government, those communities will now be

able to access natural gas. We made sure that the communities were able to access energy — natural gas, in this instance — at a cost comparable to the cost for people living in Melbourne. We should all accept that if that could be achieved, it would be a fantastic outcome.

The money remaining was used for business engagement, developing stronger regions and projects of state significance. The former government was able to get around the state, look at the opportunities and offer assistance to those people out there with some get-up-and-go about them — people who really had great ideas for great projects and who just needed some government assistance to get them on the way with capital expansion and a range of other projects that were going to deliver the outcomes they were looking for.

The rollout of the fund was obviously closely monitored. Looking back it can be seen that it provided smooth sailing for the rollout of the fund. Members who have been in this place long enough would realise that when Labor started the whole idea of a regional infrastructure development fund, it got to the stage where it could not actually spend the money that was sitting in its account. The coalition had to run a campaign to get it to spend the money in time. In the end, that Labor government simply could not spend it. It did not have the connection to the regions. With about four months to go before the election, Jacinta Allan, who was then the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, bundled up a whole bunch of money and just gave it to the councils, I think to spend on local roads. It was a program that was cobbled together in about two weeks so the government at the time could save itself the embarrassment of not being able to spend the money it had on the books in the fund.

Even with the money invested in that program Labor called Local Roads to Markets, or something like that, it still had huge amounts of money left over at the end that it simply had not allocated, again because it did not quite understand how to have those connections and how to make itself available to partner up with business and with communities. Under the coalition that constant travelling through the regions ensured that all of the communities and businesses knew that they were connected to the government of the day.

In government it is fair to suggest that not everything goes smoothly, but the other aspect which was important was the ability to at some stage go back and review the process and make sure that these grant applications that came in through the Putting Locals First Fund and the developing stronger regions program could happen in a more timely manner. That is

something that again we were able to react to and something we were able to change.

I suppose when you look back at the work that was done you realise that regional development is not just one issue here or one issue there. It is not just about looking after the councils. It is not just about being close to the community. It is not just about having an understanding of commerce and industry and business. It is not just about jobs. It is not just about the prosperity of a region or the amenity of a region. You need to make sure that you understand that it is not just about building better facilities. It is a combination of all those things, and it is about building partnerships.

Many other groups out there in the community can be incredibly helpful, and one that comes to mind is Bendigo Bank. The number of projects that were out there around regional Victoria was amazing. We were announcing or opening projects and there was the Bendigo Bank standing next to us because it also had skin in the game. It was assisting communities. Sometimes these grants from some of these funds require matching dollars. It might not be dollar for dollar; it might be one for two, or it might be one for three depending on their rurality. However, sometimes even these amounts of money are difficult for a small community to raise, and this is where partnerships with organisations like the Bendigo Bank can become incredibly important, and they are incredibly important. The bank should be acknowledged for the work it does in that area.

We were able to invest in something in the order of 1700 or 1800 different projects from around Victoria. We were able to build an amazing number of community groups and community hubs, sometimes tacked onto a sports facility or onto the town hall, depending on the dynamic of the respective community. That is what we were able to do because each of these communities had that ability to make their own decisions on their own projects. We are very proud of the fact that we were able to work in that space in a manner that best suited each of those towns. The jobs that were created were absolutely amazing. To be able to look at that now and say, 'Just with this one fund we were able to generate 23 000 new jobs' is great.

In a project close to Bendigo, at Hazeldenes, we had the family chicken farm and chicken processors who were investing to the tune of \$38 million. Our investment was around \$2.5 million — a small investment compared to Hazeldenes' capital expenditure. However, if you talk to the Hazeldene family now, it was a crucial component of the whole project. Without the government coming in and filling that gap, all of a

sudden the proprietors of these businesses go forward with these capital expansions and there is a hole in their business case and it does not quite add up. That is the fantastic role that state government can play if you have a good business engagement sector working with you in Regional Development Victoria and if you have ministers and staff in a minister's office who truly understand business and truly understand how you have to work hand in glove with these businesses.

Hazeldenes was a great example when it spent its money on upgrades to ramp up its production by about threefold — it had a great opportunity. However, in that instance it was mainly about the consolidation of the jobs Hazeldenes had grown over the previous two years. That is also an incredibly important aspect of how government can assist. You would love to be able to think that every time you assist a business in its ability to grow you are going to be able to put more people on; you are going to be able to have more Victorians working. However, with the mechanisation of many of these industries many of these jobs are in fact staying stagnant. Businesses spending many millions of dollars to become more economically viable and to make themselves more efficient and more competitive on the world markets is one thing, but it does not necessarily flow that there are going to be more jobs.

We need to look at the long-term viability of many of our businesses in regional Victoria, and we need to understand that many times we as a government have to assist a partner and co-invest with these businesses just so they can consolidate the jobs they have at the minute and make themselves truly competitive entities in the world markets. That is something that, again, we need to fully understand, and we need to work in that space.

In relation to Cotton On in Geelong, we had only been in government for about three months when I received a phone call from a friend asking me if I could meet with the proprietors of Cotton On because of a planning issue that they had not been able to get through the previous Labor government with Justin Madden as the Minister for Planning and John Brumby as the Premier. Cotton On was still operating in an area that was legally not able to be classified as a commercial area.

I remember the meeting when former Minister for Planning Matthew Guy, who is now the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, was able to fix Cotton On's problems inside a month, with the assistance of the Greater Geelong City Council. The work that had been done was just sitting there — not progressing or moving forward. That relationship with Cotton On led to a whole range of other projects. In the ensuing three

and a half to four years, Cotton On built an amazing head office at North Geelong, and it invested in about another 400 stores around the world. For every two stores Cotton On opens around the world, it employs an extra person at North Geelong. Cotton On put 500 employees on its payroll, 80 per cent of whom were women, with an average wage of over \$80 000. This was a fantastic developing business for North Geelong.

It was fantastic that we were able to partner with Cotton On when it was being wooed by some of the biggest development, industry and commerce arms in the world. Silicon Valley was trying to convince Cotton On to make its headquarters there. Singapore was trying to bring Cotton On into its jurisdiction and have its head office located there. Cotton On was offered in the vicinity of \$40 million to \$50 million to base itself in one of these overseas jurisdictions. It was great to play a part in securing the head office of Cotton On for Geelong, especially in a period when so many other jobs in Geelong were under threat at Shell, Ford and Alcoa. Those jobs were very important.

One of the great opportunities we had to do something was in the town of Shepparton, where I was brought up. That town was under a real cloud, and the \$22.5 million package we were able to provide was an incredibly important project that we will never forget. The federal government had turned its back on SPC, and former Deputy Premier Peter Ryan and former Premier Denis Napthine had to decide whether to save SPC or not. There was nowhere else for SPC to go. About 400 to 500 direct jobs and in the vicinity of 3000 other very closely related jobs were reliant on us having the flexibility within our funding arrangements to come to the party and do the deal with Coca-Cola Amatil to ensure that an extra line was built, which gave Coca-Cola Amatil the commercial competitiveness it needed. It was great to be able to go there with Peter Ryan to make that announcement and know we had the money to do it. It really was fantastic.

I could go on about these projects, but another Victorian community that has a low socio-economic rating is the town of Maryborough. It has very poor educational outcomes and very poor indicators right across the socio-economic scale. Maryborough needs a fair bit of assistance. We put together a deal with True Foods, which was based in metropolitan Melbourne. True Foods brought in the vicinity of 30 staff from Melbourne, locating its executives and leading hands in Maryborough, which provided an amazing impetus for that community. It then hired in the vicinity of 100 local people to work on its lines: making wraps and a whole range of other bread products. True Foods has

now grown that staff from around 130 to well over 170, and it is going incredibly well. We were able to visit only two months ago when we had our regional shadow cabinet meeting in Maryborough.

Basing True Foods in Maryborough has been an outstanding success. It was one of the first successes we had with the Regional Growth Fund, but it was only possible because we were ready to go when we won the election. We had the funds there, ready to assist, and therefore we were able to act. In the first three months of our government we were able to have that business liaison and engagement, and we were able to make the co-investment with True Foods to bring about this amazing result for Maryborough.

It is great today to be able to explain what went on behind the scenes to make the Regional Growth Fund the success it was: the relationships and liaisons that occurred with the various councils, the relationships we built with various industry bodies around the regions and the community consultations that took place.

What is worrying about the present situation is that all the traffic seems to be one way. Every bit of government assistance is flying out of the regions and into Melbourne. We have a government now that is not showing one skerrick of support for regional Victoria other than to talk. The Local Government Infrastructure Fund has effectively been ripped out. The Putting Locals First Fund has been abolished, as has the Energy to the Regions program. Irrespective of whether gas will be the energy source for the future, we still need to look after people living in the regions, who do not have access to comparably priced energy sources. We need a government that can think outside the square, not to help deliver a comparative advantage but simply to help deliver equality for people living outside of the metropolitan region. Energy to the Regions is another \$100 million program that has gone. The country roads and bridges program has also gone, which is another \$160 million.

We see a lot of glossy documents being put out by the government which talk about how the government is going to be building better roads, but I do not know how the government is going to be able to build better roads for country Victoria if it cuts the country roads and bridges program and keeps talking about this \$1 billion program that is out there in the ether — a billion-dollar country roads program that is in never-never land. There is simply nothing concrete or tangible about what the Labor Party is talking about when it comes to country roads and bridges. It is quite phenomenal that government members simply up and abandon regional Victoria.

Another aspect is also very worrying, and I have already asked a question of the Minister for Regional Development, Ms Pulford, on this. It is the inability or lack of desire of government members to continue with the Regional Victoria Living Expo. Again, a very small amount of money is needed to assist with the expo into the future. Opposition members understand that the government is conducting a review of the expo based on whatever sorts of indicators are being looking at and based on data from the expo that was held only a month ago, but the government made its decision not to fund the expo in the budget even before the expo was held. Again, the rhetoric just does not match.

Government members say they are going to have a look at the indicators, and they are going to analyse the fund to see whether or not they are going to fund the expo, yet they have already made the decision to scrap the funding. If anyone wants an ongoing analysis of the continuation of a funding stream, then they put the money in so that if nothing happens the status quo continues. The government has a ridiculous argument, which is that even though it has scrapped the money from the budget, it is going to have a look at the expo, see if it has any benefits and then decide if it should continue. The vast majority of councils believe the expo is a stunning success because it gives councils an opportunity to get together for an amazing weekend of networking and to promote their areas to people from Melbourne who are seriously thinking about making the move to regional Victoria.

The government is going to look at all the benefits, whether they are based around schools, recreational pursuits, job advantages or simply enabling people to cut down on travelling time. People who live out to the east of the city get sick of being stuck on Melbourne freeways, and this government does not like building roads. It just likes paying money not to do stuff. Many people want to move to country Victoria because they are sick of traffic, sick of congestion and are looking for a fresh start.

Another aspect came to light when I was looking at how the new minister was acquitting herself in her new portfolio of regional development. I came across a press release from 14 April, just over a month ago. The minister decided to have a crack at the former coalition government and the fact that in the coalition's last budget regional Victoria, despite being home to 25 per cent of the state's population, received only 4 per cent of the budget for major projects funding. She claimed that out of all the major projects funded in the last coalition budget, regional Victoria only received 4 per cent of that funding. Minister Pulford would like to get down and give members of the former coalition

government a kick in the head because of that process and because of those amounts.

Opposition members now only have to go through the very simple process of adding up what Ms Pulford's government has delivered for regional Victoria. In the budget, which was handed down just two weeks after she put out her 14 April press release, the funding for major projects in regional Victoria equates to 2.9 per cent of the state's major projects budget. The minister has said that she is not happy with the coalition's 4 per cent of major projects funding and claims that under the coalition regional Victoria went backwards and that the only thing that grew was the unemployment queue. It is a cheap shot based on the fact that we were spending 4 per cent of the major projects budget in regional Victoria. In Minister Pulford's own sneaky way, at the same time this press release was going out, she was framing her own budget that will see 2.9 per cent of major projects funding going into regional Victoria. It is a consistent and deceitful way —

Ms Crozier — Disingenuous.

Mr DRUM — Thank you, it is a disingenuous way of standing up for and working through the issues in the regions and looking at projects that are going to be delivered for regional Victoria.

It is also worth looking at some of the commitments given to regional Victoria in the lead-up to the Victorian election in late 2014. Most importantly the former coalition government made a \$75 million election commitment to fund the Goulburn Valley hospital project in Shepparton. This had been fought for over many years by the Honourable Jeanette Powell, the former member for Shepparton in the Assembly, and by The Nationals generally. Finally, on the eve of the election the coalition was able to make a fully funded commitment to the community of Shepparton, so it was very disappointing that when this budget came out there was a paltry \$1 million for planning the hospital project. I suppose it will take another couple of years for this process to play out. It is extremely disappointing that that project is effectively going nowhere.

Another disappointment surrounded the funding of \$178 million for regional rail services, an election commitment by the former coalition government. That funding was announced prior to the election, but seems to have gone nowhere with the new Minister for Public Transport, the Honourable Jacinta Allan. These services were going to see an additional Saturday evening service to Shepparton, a Sunday evening service to Shepparton and additional weekday services to

Shepparton along with a whole range of other projects and other timetable improvements and additional services right around regional Victoria. It is very disappointing to see that that money has evaporated due to a lack of interest in regional Victoria by a government that is so political about where it invests its money and contributes to regional Victoria.

One of the things that broke my heart when I was sports minister was to do with funding for my old footy club at Werribee. The club wants a couple of million dollars for an \$11 million project, but on the quiet its members say they will never get help from the Labor Party because it just takes them for granted at Werribee. They believe the only way they will ever get help is if the money comes to them from the coalition. The coalition was unable to find the money at that time, but it is interesting to see the purely political views taken by members of the Labor Party when it comes to where they direct their money. Marginal seats seem to be the order of the day, and everyone else can fend for themselves.

It is a shame that six months on nothing has happened. We are waiting for the review to be presented. We have only heard announcements so far, but there is a real worry that the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is simply a substitution fund as opposed to a regional development on-top-of fund.

We only have to look at projects that have usually been funded through other portfolios, such as the Stawell Gift. The Stawell Gift is a monte. Yes, it should receive government support — of course it should; it is an iconic event for regional Victoria — but it has always been funded by the coalition through the sports portfolio. However, the government is leaving that money in the sports budget and will fund the race out of the jobs and training portfolio. I cannot understand how on earth the sponsorship of a foot race coming out of a jobs and training bucket of money works.

This is all about the pea and thimble. It is about how we are going to take money out of this fund and leave money back here in Melbourne. This Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is now shaping up to fund environmental, horticultural, health and sporting projects. And that is before these funds have got started. God knows where they will end when they do get started. The government is starting to take money from this fund to fund all these other portfolios. Having been a minister, I understand the pressure when you have other ministers coming to you asking for money out of your fund to fund one of their projects. I understand that pressure, but this is about when you need to be strong and when you need a minister who understands that this

fund is critical for the improvement and development of regional Victoria.

The other ministries can look after themselves. If they cannot find enough money for a dental prosthetics lab in the Latrobe Valley in the health budget, then that is the problem of the Department of Health and Human Services. It is not the problem of the department of state development. We need to look at the projects that do not fit into other portfolios and do not fit into the budgets of other funding streams and which need this money to create more jobs, more productivity and greater prosperity for the regions.

This substitution issue has been exposed quite readily over the last two months, and it looks as though the government has no intention of changing its direction on this. I am hoping that when the John Brumby review of Regional Development Victoria comes down we will see some guidelines and regulations about what projects will be able to be funded under this fund. My worry is that the government has already set the precedent by saying it will fund other projects. I do not know how it will be possible to marry up consistent guidelines and criteria to form what we all understand a regional development fund to be. We will have to wait and see, but my fear is that the guidelines will come back to suit the decisions that have already been made, because it is going to be very embarrassing if some projects have to be defunded because they have been moved to other portfolios. The next thing we will be doing is building schools and roads out of the regional development fund as well!

That is a worry for those of us who live in regional Victoria and know what we were able to achieve in the previous four years. We understand how much work went into building all the relationships and how complex the whole arrangement is for it to work and come together at the end. Here we are, six months into the government's term, and we have had no action, no movement and no announcements about projects getting started. Everything is on hold, waiting for an inquiry to be completed. That to me is an incredible pity.

We will not be opposing this bill. We wish it to get through the house quickly. We hope the John Brumby review is finished quickly so that this government can start getting some projects on the books in the regions, turning over some dirt and getting something built.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — In the first part of Mr Drum's presentation I was thinking he was going to devote himself solely to the mechanics of this particular bill and the governance arrangements

that come with it and not canvass the entire universe of possibilities as to what might be the correct policies for Regional Development Victoria. I thought it was going to be a fairly tight contribution, and I was going to follow suit in the same format.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BARBER — Let us just wait and see. The bill, as members would be aware, is to create a new version — perhaps a rebadged version — of a regional growth fund that the previous government had that was itself an evolution on the previous version created in about 2005 under the Bracks government, which was then titled the Provincial Victoria Growth Fund. Apparently we are not allowed to use the term ‘provincial’ anymore. We now have to refer to rural and regional Victoria. We have a new format for this fund, we have an allocation of funds to it, we have an already pretty long list of projects that have been promised from it and at the same time we have a review of the fund being undertaken by former Premier Brumby.

If I were to talk solely about the arrangements for the governance of the fund, I might go to the Auditor-General’s review of the previous version that was the Provincial Victoria Growth Fund (PVGf). In about 2012 the Auditor-General reviewed the PVGF, which he noted operated from 2005 through to the end of the Brumby government. Here is what the Auditor-General said about it:

Regional Development Victoria (RDV) undertook a wide range of planning activities to develop and plan for implementing the Provincial Victoria Growth Fund (PVGf). However, some deficiencies meant that RDV could not demonstrate that the fund was soundly based. While there were criteria for prioritising initiatives to be funded, assessment decisions were not adequately documented and criteria were not applied consistently to all funding decisions. Also, there was no business case underpinning it.

That is why I find it a little bit ironic that John Brumby has been asked to come in to review the operation of a regional growth fund when its immediate predecessor was given a somewhat patchy report card by the Auditor-General.

As I noted, a long list of projects have already been pre-approved for funding from the fund. They include everything from the Ballarat railway station redevelopment, the Harcourt mountain bike trail, the Euroa saleyards, the Wangaratta saleyards, the Geelong Performing Arts Centre and the Gippsland logistics precinct, and I am only halfway down the first column. Many of these projects could themselves be meritorious. I am not necessarily speaking against any

individual project here; in fact I spoke in favour of some of them during the election. My point is simply that since there is a long list of projects that have been pre-approved, one wonders how the paperwork and the assessment — let alone the evaluation or the business case — will be presented by the new fund with the new agency over time. If we are here a few years from now, it could be that many of these projects have received their funding but we are not necessarily any the wiser as to what the original business case was and therefore how the anticipated benefits of the project have been delivered.

I am 100 per cent sure that anybody in any rural or regional community will be very grateful to receive funds for the projects the government has foreshadowed. There is no doubt that they would rather have any of those projects funded for their communities than a kick in the teeth. However, the bill, the second-reading speech and the debate — at least the part we have had so far — have been about the governance, the processes and the rigour of getting maximum bang for your buck from the scarce amount of public dollars that are made available.

I do believe that some of the arrangements being put in place in this bill are an improvement. I am not suggesting for one minute that this fund is a slush fund; I would not go that far. I think, however, the little history lesson we had from Mr Drum would suggest that it is not always easy to keep track of what has been promised to whom, why and with what intended result.

As I said, I do not have any intention of giving a complete treatise on what I think the needs of regional Victoria are at this given time, unless by interjection members start inviting me to do so. The 34 initiatives put forward by Labor during the election will, we all hope, be delivered and delivered in a timely fashion. However, when you sum them all up they do not necessarily represent a plan or a vision for regional Victoria. There are a number of challenges in regional Victoria at the moment that need to be addressed, and they will be addressed by the government getting the basics right. We have a youth unemployment problem in regional Victoria. We need programs to keep those youths engaged, and we need to remove some of the barriers to them finding employment in their communities. The chainsawing of the TAFE system that commenced under the Brumby government and was continued under the last government is a major part of that problem that needs to be addressed.

We seem to be on the verge of another impending drought. These droughts are going to become more frequent and more severe.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr BARBER — It was 100 per cent predictable: a member by interjection has invited me to address the issue of climate change. Let us just cover that off by saying that in regional Victoria there is currently a great opportunity to address climate change through the development of renewables. Just a few weeks back it was announced that the coalmine and power station at Anglesea is to close. Alcoa spent 14 months trying to unload it onto some other player in the electricity industry. It failed, and it recently announced that it was closing down the facility.

Mr Ramsay — And 80 jobs will be gone.

Mr BARBER — Mr Ramsay is correct. The closure of Anglesea and other coal-fired power stations was absolutely 100 per cent predictable as a result of other policies that have been put in place in state and federal parliaments over many years. We have been working very hard to decarbonise our economy over that time. We had a renewable energy target which was to bring into the grid a certain amount of solar, wind and other renewables. We had a Victorian energy efficiency target that was to reduce millions of tons of CO₂, in the process avoiding millions of megawatt hours of energy consumption. It was a predictable outcome of all those policies that we would end up with surplus power in the grid, but at the moment there is no clear plan to address the adjustment.

Everybody in this chamber understands that the automotive industry, as a result of certain policy decisions made 10 and more years ago, is on a path to shut itself down. We have programs in place to deal with that transition. There is still political blame-shifting about it, but everybody understands the transition that is occurring.

The members of this government appear to have been absolutely blindsided by the same transition that is occurring in coal-fired power, which is the inevitable result of those programs I mentioned and others that have been at play for a very long time. And so it was that during the budget estimates hearings when the Minister for Regional Development was asked what she would do about the workers who have lost their jobs and need assistance to move into another part of the energy industry, she did not have an answer in relation to her portfolio, the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund or any other lever of policy. In fact her response to the committee was to talk about how the government is spending money at the Geelong Performing Arts Centre. I do not see the connection between someone who is working at a coal-fired power station and the

operation of an expanded, upgraded and improved arts centre in central Geelong.

Surely the government has a plan for this transition. In fact I am wrong about that, because with regard to renewable energy Labor's promise whilst in opposition was to develop a plan for renewable energy. Its promise was, 'Elect us, and then we will develop a plan'. That is like saying, 'Elect us, and we'll develop a plan for hospitals. Elect us, and we'll develop a plan for education. Elect us, and we'll develop a plan for public transport'. Apparently the government thought it could get away with it in the area of renewables, so we have no plan in Victoria for renewables. We also have an unrelenting and unremittingly hostile attitude from the federal government towards renewables, so when that coal-fired power station closed down there was no transition plan, no funds were made available and there was no acceptance from the government that it should have been on the spot with a plan to move those people into the growth sector of renewables.

The skills of coal-fired power operators, being mechanical and electrical engineers, are highly adaptable to operating in the large-scale renewable sector. It is just that there is no pipeline of projects ready to go because the federal government has been doing everything it can to destroy the industry and the incoming Andrews government simply said, 'We'll get in there, and when we have ourselves in the big chairs and have our business cards then we'll turn our minds to the renewable energy industry and come up with a plan'.

There is very little to show with regard to public transport for rural and regional Victoria, as members know from scrutinising the budget papers. There is some purchase of rolling stock for the new Geelong rail link, which V/Line said five years ago would be standing room only on day one. There are continued problems on other lines, like Bairnsdale and to the north-east, and there is nothing to keep up with the level of patronage growth. V/Line coach services, which cost us only \$32 million a year now, could easily have been expanded and upgraded to provide more connectivity to existing rail lines, but there is not a sausage there.

It is becoming harder and harder to access the opportunities of regional Victoria, whether it be employment, education or basic services. For that matter, if members have ever tried it, it is not too easy to travel as a tourist to spend some money in regional Victoria for a day, a weekend or a week. West of Apollo Bay there are three coaches a week along the Great Ocean Road. It is not particularly easy to tour through the Grampians, down to Port Fairy and along

the coast from there, with an irregular and poorly publicised bus service. You can head off for the weekend for a great cycle tour, but bad luck if the train gets cancelled and is replaced by a bus, because you cannot take your bike on the bus. On something as core to our everyday lives as transport — getting from A to B — there is no vision.

The government will have its high-profile projects, ribbon cuttings and photo opportunities, but these projects and in many cases these communities will be let down by the lack of a basic vision for getting the basics right in regional Victoria. The Greens will support the bill and follow with interest the progress of the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund and how projects funded from it deliver for regional Victoria.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — It is a real and substantive pleasure to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015. I do not propose to even attempt to go into the voluminous detail that Mr Drum did when he made his contribution, and I note with approval and gratitude that Mr Barber did not increase Mr Drum's carbon footprint by going on longer than he needed to in relation to the preparatory work, development and strategy that are necessary in coming up with a regional plan that delivers substantive policy outcomes, benefits and investments for Victorians in the medium to long term as we look towards periods of increased growth, population spikes and further demand for services and programs that require infrastructure and employment support as well as investment in the sorts of things that make our regional communities great.

It is a personal thing for me to speak on this bill, because I live in regional Victoria. I am proud to be of Warragul and proud to be of Gippsland. I spend a lot of time between the western part of Gippsland, right up to the edge of Pakenham where the housing estates continue to spread, and Mallacoota, which is on the border with New South Wales. It is a huge and diverse area, and it is an area that in the past, under the previous government and given the incumbency of people occupying seats in the other place, has been neglected. I say that without any risk of contradiction in terms of the dollars that have failed to be invested in this area. It is an area that can benefit hugely from the attention, the resources, the assistance and, most specifically, the engagement it will get under what this bill seeks to achieve.

The changes to the way regional development is funded and policy initiatives are implemented will come about as a consequence of the \$500 million Regional Jobs and

Infrastructure Fund, which is the centrepiece in this government's commitment to giving better, substantive attention to, spending smart money on, and having good-faith engagement with people from, regional communities. The first step is to establish this fund and deliver the investment that is needed in all parts of regional Victoria, but most meaningfully and specifically for me, as a local member in Gippsland, in that part of the world, which encompasses many diverse areas and sectors from the Latrobe Valley to East Gippsland, the high country, Phillip Island and South Gippsland in particular.

The legislative framework we need in order to invest that \$500 million will enable the government to deliver jobs and infrastructure and to strengthen communities in regional Victoria. The administrative provisions are necessary in order to consolidate the framework to create the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, comprising a \$250 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to invest in the projects that regional cities and towns need; a \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund to help communities to grow their workforces, expand their markets and create the jobs of the future; and the Stronger Regional Communities plan to strengthen regional communities and help our towns attract families and young people to live and work in rural and regional settings. This is crucial.

We have seen time after time the unemployment figures and the problems associated with isolation, the tyranny of distance and a lack of access to equivalent services and programs that people in metropolitan and peri-urban areas enjoy. The further we get away from Melbourne, the more difficult it is to find a doctor, a childcare place or a job; the more difficult it is to find access to the same quality of recreational services and facilities that people in the more densely built-up areas enjoy; and the more difficult it is to access help and assistance when you need it. Our emergency services workers do the very best they can, but they need all the assistance they can get. Those who deliver our programs and services in regional Victoria often operate on a shoestring; they often operate with an increased reliance upon the stamina and resilience that is inherent in regional communities in order to deliver, often on not much at all.

The bill makes important changes in order to deliver on the election commitment to establish this regional fund. It means that the focus of regional investment will be renewed on infrastructure, jobs and strengthening communities. These are things that are not going to happen with the stroke of a pen; they require persistence and hard work. It is not comfortable work, and it is not easy work, but it is work that is absolutely

warranted and absolutely deserved. Regional communities often deliver significant funds to our state economy, and they also deliver significant returns. Regional communities are boons for tourism destinations. They have their own personalities and their own histories — the stories from regional Victoria are extraordinary, and I encourage everyone to make sure that they are well acquainted with the areas beyond the city or the centre in which they live and may not otherwise go beyond unless required.

The bill continues a sensible, time-tested model for government investment. The model is based on dedicated investment funds for regional Victoria and on an advisory committee to give regional communities a voice in regional policymaking alongside Regional Development Victoria. This means that regional Victoria will remain a focus in the Andrews Labor government's policy agenda. It will retain provisions that establish Regional Development Victoria as the lead agency for economic and community development in regional and rural areas, it will incorporate provisions for regional development funding that were previously provided by the Regional Growth Fund Act 2011, and it will also establish a new advisory body to replace the Regional Policy Advisory Committee.

It is unfortunate that in Mr Drum's contribution he repeatedly indicated that not much had been done and that regional Victoria had not received any significant or substantive benefit from the Andrews Labor government since it was elected at the end of November last year. Nothing could be further from the truth. This government has worked assiduously not just through the profile and ministerial offices of regional development and of agriculture but also through several other ministerial portfolios and the Premier's own office to make sure that regional development is considered and our regional and rural communities are listened to, are engaged with and are part of the conversation about the need for continuous improvement.

The Regional Growth Fund is being abolished and consolidated into the Regional Development Victoria Act 2002. That fund was established by the coalition government and, as Mr Drum indicated, it was established to support regional communities and grow the economy. In the estimation of the Andrews Labor government and of many communities that were supposed to be the beneficiaries of that fund it failed abysmally. Regional Victoria in fact went backwards. Engagement went backwards. Dialogue went backwards. Consultation went backwards. Meaningful planning to ensure that Victoria could and would have significant prospects in the medium and long term went

backwards. Unemployment grew, and TAFE was gutted. What we saw were regional centres, the hearts of communities, lose their opportunities for jobs and education. We saw the infrastructure spend suffer.

This bill paves the way to deliver major projects that extend right through regional Victoria. Those opposite will be very hesitant to acknowledge that these actually constitute the investment of real money as opposed to last-minute election commitments that were never part of any budget or forward estimates period. These investments will grow jobs by investing in the Latrobe Valley — in my area — by investing in training and education and by making sure that research and development is part of our agenda for the future of the regional areas beyond our metropolitan suburban borders. It will make sure that community leadership is at the forefront of investment by investing in the regional community leadership program now and in the future.

The bill means that we have initiatives such as the Gippsland logistics precinct, with a spend of \$10 million, to facilitate the development of a major freight hub to transport goods from and across the Gippsland region. It will be located in Morwell and will target businesses which would use rail to transport their products. We will also see initiatives like the Geelong Performing Arts Centre, which is receiving a \$30 million investment. The project will enhance the Ryrie Street entrance, turn the steeple church into a cabaret theatre, add two more dance studios and improve disability access. We will see the Latrobe Valley university training clinic allocated \$1 million to put towards a project that will include a purpose-built health training centre with associated primary healthcare services and a dental prosthetics manufacturing facility at Federation University's Churchill campus. We will see these initiatives operating alongside the biggest ever education spend in Victoria's history. We will see these historic investments go towards making sure that our communities are better resourced, better equipped and have access to better information.

These resources, investments and conversations will continue in a good-faith way, one that means that regional views will be sought as part of the development of policy. Regional views will also form a significant component of decisions taken by government around what is needed now and into the future. This is how good government operates. It does not tell regional Victorians what it is that they want; it asks them what they need and what their priorities are.

This strategy has been developed as part of an extensive consultation process. Regional Victorian communities and local governments have been brought along as part of this journey. They will see better investment and employment opportunities, better investment in education, better investment in arts and culture and better investment in the very things that make our various communities so special. We will see a Regional Jobs Fund that makes sure that those sectors identified by the Future Industries Fund are given absolute, real and meaningful priority. They will see investment that means that we plan projects now to realise gains into the future. It is about having a better set of priorities, one that has been developed with regional communities.

I am very proud to be part of the government that has brought this bill to the house. The bill will maintain the definition of 'rural and regional Victoria' as provided by current regional development legislation. Support available to local government and small towns under the fund can be used to provide better infrastructure, services and facilities, strengthening the economic and social or environmental basis of communities, creating jobs and improving career opportunities for regional Victorians, supporting local project development or indeed any other project to support economic and community development in rural and regional Victoria, as determined by the Minister for Regional Development.

There is also a country crossings program, which the Premier, along with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Luke Donnellan, came down to Gippsland to announce. It will boost 52 priority roads and level crossings as well as provide a guaranteed minimum \$1 billion in funding to upgrade and repair regional roads. We saw massive swathes of cuts to the repair, maintenance and upgrade program which was run under the former government. We saw funding magically appear and then only in hypothetical terms when the caretaker period before the election was all but ready to begin. This is real money; these are real conversations. This bill will give effect to those conversations to make those changes that deliver on our election commission commitments.

With minimal legislative change we will establish this fund and renew the focus of regional investment in the way that we said we would. We are delivering on our promises. This is a government that has brought those promises to book. It has delivered on what it said it would do. This year's budget puts real money into the hands of regional communities to enable them to realise their full potential and determine how it is that they would like their futures to evolve.

The bill makes sure that regional and rural Victoria is front and centre of the Andrews Labor government's policy agenda. I am proud to be part of it. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I rise to contribute to the debate on the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015, and I do so as a proud Liberal regional member of Parliament who has always strived to provide better living and working conditions for those who choose to reside in regional Victoria and to encourage those who are considering a lifestyle in regional Victoria.

I want to acknowledge my parliamentary colleague Damian Drum for his expansive contribution in relation to this bill. You could see his passion for this in the way he related the many achievements of the Regional Growth Fund for regional communities across Victoria. That is why I am and have always been so supportive of the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund, including the way it was structured to allow both macro priority investments as well as micro priority investments driven by local communities. I congratulate the architect of the fund, Mr Clay Manners, who was well schooled as policy director at the Victorian Farmers Federation. He played a significant role in the success of the Regional Growth Fund.

Within the Regional Growth Fund was the Putting Locals First Fund, which helped local communities add value to current local community assets. There was also the Local Government Infrastructure Fund, supporting local government initiatives, and the Energy for the Regions program that provided natural gas to a number of towns in my electorate of Western Victoria Region, including Winchelsea, Bannockburn and Terang. Only yesterday I was travelling down the beautiful Princes Highway west, Mr Dalidakis, and could see the Napthine and Abbott government's contribution of \$500 million to duplicate the Princes Highway west, as well as the planning process now underway for the road between Winchelsea and Colac, which is another initiative of the federal government and the previous state coalition government.

The Regional Growth Fund had 1426 targeted funding outcomes and gave \$500 million to regional Victoria through 1800 projects. It is worthwhile just going back a little bit in history to see what the Regional Growth Fund produced because we need to question why the Andrews Labor government would see fit to rebadge, rename and reintroduce it as yet another fund to replace one that had a proven track record in relation to outcomes.

The fact is that the Regional Growth Fund created a \$3 return for every \$1 invested, which in turn created 23 000 new regional jobs, 6000 direct full-time jobs and 12 000 indirect jobs, including 5000 construction jobs. In my home town of Geelong, the Regional Growth Fund provided \$28 million to 40 projects that leveraged \$373 million in total investment.

Some of the projects in the Geelong region, as outlined in previous contributions, included \$15 million for the Geelong Library and Heritage Centre. I invite Ms Shing to come down and see this beautiful egg-shaped, architecturally designed project that is rising up — unfortunately not higher than the floodlights at Simonds Stadium, but which nevertheless is a wonderful piece of architecture in the CBD. I congratulate the City of Greater Geelong for its contribution of \$10 million to that project. Then there was \$3 million for the \$25 million St Mary's Hall redevelopment given as part of the Regional Growth Fund. There was \$500 000 for the revitalisation of laneways in Geelong, and we have already seen some of that work done. There was also \$2.4 million for the Austin Park redevelopment. That is just to name a few examples.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — In total in the Geelong region, Ms Shing, \$44.8 million was delivered to 15 major projects across the region, which leveraged \$460 million in total investment.

In western Victoria it was the investments for community use in the smaller towns that were so much appreciated. In fact I was with Hugh Delahunty, who was the minister for sport at the time, when we turned the first sod at Alexandra Oval community and recreation centre in Ararat using a mix of sport and regional development funding of \$1.2 million. I was at the opening of that facility last year. I congratulate Joe Helper, the former member for Ripon in the Assembly, who contributed to the success of that multipurpose facility being built.

I was also with Hugh Delahunty, the minister for sport at the time, when we turned a sod for the new soccer complex at Morshead Park, Ballarat, after a \$2 million investment from the Regional Growth Fund. I am sure my colleague Joshua Morris will talk more about that shortly when he makes his contribution to the debate.

The Ballarat railway station upgrade is something I was very passionate about when I was located in Ballarat, following the work done in the feasibility study to see how we could maximise the use of that whole precinct. That funding also came through the Regional Growth

Fund. It is pleasing to now see that there has been a commitment to upgrade the goods shed and other areas around that precinct to make it into a real historical centre. Again, my parliamentary colleague Joshua Morris will expand on the good work that went on and continues around that precinct thanks to the Regional Growth Fund.

I could talk about small infrastructure projects in communities like Stawell, Smythesdale, Avoca and even my home town of Birregurra, where the rail trail feasibility study was financed by the Regional Growth Fund. I could talk about the Ocean Grove community hub — which was the old neighbourhood house — the opening of which I attended only last week. Peter Ryan contributed \$500 000 to that project through the Regional Growth Fund to enable that facility to expand. It was pleasing to see the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, Ms Neville, who is the member for Bellarine in the Assembly, acknowledge Peter Ryan's work in providing the financial contribution from the Regional Growth Fund to that centre.

I refer to some of the bigger projects that the Regional Growth Fund supported in Western Victoria. I know my colleague Damian Drum mentioned Cotton On in Geelong. The company grows and grows every day, and has been a real success story employing over 500 people. It has also been a huge philanthropic benefactor to many activities around Geelong. I congratulate the Austin family on their work. I also congratulate those involved in providing Regional Growth Fund money to expand the business. Midfield Meats in Warrnambool, the Australian Lamb Company in Colac and True Foods in Maryborough are all large employers that benefited from the Regional Growth Fund, which helped to expand those businesses and employ many people in jobs that would not otherwise be available in smaller towns. We had a successful funding mechanism specifically for regional Victoria. It worked, and it was acclaimed by all who were connected to it.

With this bill the Andrews government rebadges the growth fund as a mixed bag of funds. We have the \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund, the \$250 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and the \$50 million Stronger Regional Communities plan. But will this pack of sweeteners actually deliver to regional communities other than the large regional cities of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo, or will the money flow to non-regional infrastructure like Labor's old regional infrastructure fund that found funds being diverted into the pockets of interface councils?

In its election promises the government has already committed \$60 million in Geelong. New section 17(1) of the Regional Development Victoria Act 2002 gives the minister discretionary power to put more dollars into large regional cities or even into interface metropolitan regions at the expense of regional communities. We have already seen the Andrews government's form in using ministerial discretion for regional infrastructure funding to finance sporting events like the Victorian open and the Stawell Gift and to upgrade sporting stadiums like Eureka Stadium, which should have come out of the budgets of tourism and sport.

Although the coalition does not oppose the bill, it is hard to trust a government that has cut funding in agriculture, cut funding for regional development, cut funding for tourism and scrapped the \$160 million country roads and bridges program as well as foreshadowing an increase of 7.2 per cent to the fire services levy, which will impact regional ratepayers right across Victoria.

Why would we trust a government that says, 'Trust us', as it has been cutting funding programs to regional Victoria? As the Assembly member for Wendouree, Sharon Knight, proudly claimed in the *Ballarat Courier*, 'We are here to govern for all'. Did she mean her union constituency at Trades Hall or did she mean that the bill, a pale imitation of the Regional Growth Fund, will be a mechanism to provide infrastructure and jobs to regional Victoria. In racing parlance, Labor's track record does not give us confidence that we are backing a winner.

Mr DALIDAKIS (Southern Metropolitan) — There is an old Yiddish definition of 'chutzpah', which is that a boy kills his parents and then claims the defence of being an orphan. It is galling to stand here and listen to a lecture from both Mr Ramsay and Mr Drum about a program that did not deliver for regional Victoria. I can only suggest to the Acting President that he find somebody else to replace him in the chair so he has an opportunity to interject, because I remind him that it was the natural gas extension program under the Bracks and Brumby governments that delivered natural gas to a whole suite of country Victorian towns that would never otherwise have got it.

Mr Davis interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr Davis is being unruly by interjecting from somewhere other than his seat. I point out that Bairnsdale is one such town. Bairnsdale received natural gas under the Bracks and Brumby government programs, and as a result Patties Foods

managed to put on more people. How do I know that? It is because I was the energy adviser to the energy minister at the time. We delivered natural gas right across Victoria. Mr Davis should hang his head in shame. He should walk out of the chamber embarrassed at the efforts of the previous government in relation to regional Victoria and at its decision to pork-barrel and not to deliver outcomes for regional Victorians.

Mr Drum spent 60 minutes on goodness knows what other than suggesting that it is about jobs. I will give Mr Drum a job. He can apply for the coaching position at Carlton. There is a possible job for him, because unfortunately it has now become available. Thankfully the Victorian government now treats rural and regional Victorians with far greater importance than the opposition did in government, because its fund — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — We have heard about Cotton On. Each member of the opposition has spoken about Cotton On. Let me tell members that there are far more industries, far more employers, far more families today receiving natural gas throughout Victoria as a direct result of the initiatives of the Bracks and Brumby governments under the natural gas extension program, and Mr Davis would do well to remember history. If he has forgotten it, I am happy to find some time to teach him about the history of the Bracks and Brumby governments delivering for rural and regional Victoria.

Mr Davis interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I was the chief executive of a major rural and regional industry, the Victorian Association of Forest Industries, the peak employer representative body. It gave me great pleasure to represent it in rural and regional industries across Victoria during my three and a half years with the association. It is something that Mr Davis has never done. He has never looked after rural and regional constituents — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I ask Mr Dalidakis to speak through the Chair, and I ask Mr Davis to make any contributions from his place.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, Acting President, for bringing me back to speaking through the Chair. I remind Mr Davis that if he needs a lesson in how Labor governments deliver for rural and regional Victoria, I am very happy to tell him what we did in that time and about my experience working on behalf of rural and regional members, their employees, the families of their employees and the communities they worked in. It

might be an inconvenient truth for Mr Davis and the coalition, but it is nonetheless the truth that under the natural gas extension program, amongst myriad other programs that were rolled out under the previous Regional Infrastructure Development Fund under the then Minister for Regional and Rural Development, John Brumby, we made it a priority to look after rural and regional Victoria. Given my background, it gives me great pleasure to note that the Andrews government is going to deliver for rural and regional Victorians once again. It gives me great pleasure to note that we will continue to look after those that a true coalition government should look after but unfortunately did not look after in the previous Parliament.

This is a \$500 million Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. The Andrews Labor government went to the election last year with it as one of its commitments. As we have shown already in our brief five or six-month period in office, we keep our election commitments. Some may be popular, some may be unpopular. This one should be very popular, because we are delivering \$500 million in a Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, which is made up of \$250 million for the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to invest in projects for regional cities and towns that need it. We will have a \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund to help companies grow their workforces, expand their markets and obviously create jobs for the future. There will also be a \$50 million Stronger Regional Communities plan to strengthen regional communities and help our towns attract families and young people to live in rural and regional settings.

I might add a couple more issues. The first issue is that if the opposition is not opposing this bill, it should just be supportive of the bill, not have the lead speaker spend 60 minutes and every subsequent speaker 15 minutes arguing against the benefit for rural and regional Victoria and then saying at the end, 'Ah, but we're going to support the bill'. Come out and have a unity ticket and say, 'A strong and vibrant rural and regional Victoria is actually good for the state', because we on this side of the chamber believe it. We will work tirelessly. As the Premier has said, every waking minute of every waking hour of every day we will continue to contribute and work hard so that all Victorians can share in everything that we do and prosper.

I might reflect that if Mr Drum is so opposed to cuts in rural and regional Victoria, I would welcome a contribution or an interjection from him to say how many times he has written to the current Prime Minister and the current federal Treasurer, who have stolen billions of dollars from all Victorians' services, from

health services in the rural and regional areas of Victoria to recreational grants to sporting and community grants to education funding. Where is the outcry from those opposite, now in opposition, who cry crocodile tears about rural and regional Victoria? Where are the mountains of correspondence from all of them to the current Prime Minister and Treasurer, pleading for them to reinstate the billions of dollars of funding taken from our health and education sectors, money which has been cruelly stolen from the families, the children and the communities the opposition claims to represent?

Here we have a \$500 million fund for rural and regional Victoria, and all opposition members can do is have a bit of a whinge and say, 'Oh, but we'll support the bill'. Those opposite should support the bill and support what the bill is trying to achieve because, as we all know, if we can develop communities in rural and regional Victoria, we develop jobs. Every employer losing jobs in a community affects the State Emergency Service, the local football teams, the local netball teams and the ability of schools to have children attending — you lose that scale for the school to be viable — and as a result the community is diminished. We are trying to ensure that communities are not diminished. We are trying to ensure that communities grow and prosper.

I would welcome those in the opposition, instead of them having a bit of a whingefest over there and trying to find some kind of relevance in the chamber, genuinely joining with us in bipartisan work to help grow regional and rural Victoria, because rural and regional Victoria have dwindled over the last four years. While Ryan fiddled, country Victoria burned as a result of the previous government.

Here we have a positive plan for rural and regional Victoria. We have a number of plans and funds — a \$250 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, a \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund and a \$50 million Stronger Regional Communities plan — and this is about growing all of Victoria. It has rural and regional Victoria at its heart. The plan in this bill is all about country Victoria. It is something we should all get onboard with, because we all want a vibrant rural and regional Victoria.

I commend this bill to the house. Instead of using their time to try to rewrite their history in government, I strongly support and encourage those opposite to use the time to say — should this fund be successful in communities in Ballarat for Mr Morris or for Mr Drum's electorate in country Victoria — 'This will be good for my communities and we look forward to working with the government to ensure that our

employers can employ more people, we can attract more residents to our towns, we can get a bigger football club, a bigger netball club and a bigger State Emergency Service unit, we can attract more services to the region and to the communities, and that way we can actually grow every part of Victoria so that we have a wonderful story to sell across the country and internationally’.

Victoria is a fantastic place. It is a great place to live, it is a great place to work and it is still a great place to raise a family, and country Victoria needs to be at the forefront of that. I love this legislation. As a former chief executive of a rural and regional industry body, I am empowered by this kind of legislation and the funding we are putting into it. I believe this legislation and the \$500 million that goes with it is a positive step for rural and regional Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, I was in my room doing some work when I distinctly heard the member on his feet call Tony Abbott by name and say that he had stolen money from Victorians. He did not use the common nouns ‘government’, ‘federal government’ or anything like that. He called him by name, and that is against standing orders because it is a reflection on a member of Parliament in another chamber in another Parliament, and I ask that you ask him to withdraw that comment.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Thank you, Mrs Peulich. I will get it verified by Hansard. I am going to uphold the point of order because I heard Mr Dalidakis refer to the Prime Minister by name and I also heard the word ‘stolen’. I will give him the option of withdrawing those remarks now, or I will ask for a search of *Hansard* and refer the matter to the President. Is Mr Dalidakis happy to withdraw the remark?

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am happy to withdraw the remark and refer to Tony Abbott as Prime Minister.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — And the word ‘stolen’.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I believe the budget papers prove that, but I am happy to withdraw again.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — It is an unqualified withdrawal. Thank you, Mr Dalidakis.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — First of all I acknowledge my colleague Mr Drum for his passionate and expansive commentary today and the contribution

that he makes. I understand he has long experience and history with and a full knowledge of this area.

It is with pleasure that I speak on the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015. I note that the bill repeals the Regional Growth Fund Act 2011 and makes minor changes and amendments to the Regional Development Victoria Act 2002 to achieve what I suppose you could call a rebranded version of the coalition’s highly successful Regional Growth Fund.

As some of my colleagues in the other house have pointed out, the city-centric Labor government’s Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, in contrast, really seems to take the ‘growth’ out of the coalition’s Regional Growth Fund. After years of the coalition government slowly clawing back from Labor’s neglect of the regions through its successful fund, I am concerned that the Labor government’s new spin on this fund is just that — spin — and that the smaller regional communities that desperately need funding to improve their infrastructure and create jobs may miss out. Labor’s understanding of geography is a concern. Regional and rural communities are not just in Geelong and Ballarat. They are in Mallacoota, Dumbalk and Pyramid Hill; they are out in the country. Sometimes Labor’s definition of ‘rural and regional’ is not my definition.

The reason our Regional Growth Fund worked so well was that decisions were made by local people on local projects. They were community-driven projects undertaken by community organisations with the assistance of local councils in many cases. Under the Regional Growth Fund delivered by the then Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional and Rural Development, Peter Ryan, \$500 million was sensibly and usefully divided amongst many major schemes. Mr Drum in his contribution gave a great and interesting brief of many of those, but I will highlight again some of the important schemes. For example, \$100 million was provided through the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. With 48 regional councils, this equated to approximately \$2 million per council for them to undertake small and medium projects. Importantly, there was community consultation. The coalition government also delivered \$100 million through the Putting Locals First Fund and \$100 million for the Energy for the Regions program.

On the other hand, Labor’s imitation fund seems to have missed the point, with large sums of money already committed out of it. It makes me wonder whether these funding allocations are really what are wanted and needed by the regions or whether the

decisions have come down from Labor's Melbourne hierarchy with little industry, council or community consultation. If you look at the budget delivered a couple of weeks ago, you see that only 2.9 per cent of funding is allocated for major projects in what I would class as rural and regional Victoria.

The coalition's Regional Growth Fund invested \$500 million, leveraged to \$2 billion. It secured \$3 for every \$1 spent by government. It created 23 000 jobs right across regional and rural Victoria, including 6000 full-time jobs, over 11 000 indirect jobs and nearly 5000 construction jobs.

The fund invested in more than 1800 projects, and I want to discuss a couple of them. In my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region, two major expansion projects occurred in the dairy industry: Burra Foods and Murray Goulburn in Leongatha. In East Gippsland over \$15 million was invested in projects including but not limited to the Bairnsdale all-abilities playground, the Bairnsdale library precinct and CBD project, and upgrades to East Gippsland visitor information centres. In South Gippsland funding was provided for expansion projects at Viplus Dairy, Maffra Cheese Company and Australian Sustainable Hardwoods, along with the Yarram district hub project. In the Morwell electorate the Regional Growth Fund invested \$17.2 million to deliver 67 local projects, leveraging \$61.3 million in total. This included the development of the Gippsland Plains rail trail, an upgrade to the Yallourn North town hall, along with funds for Stirloch Constructions to develop and construct a precast concrete fabrication facility.

Another important initiative was seen as highly successful and was implemented in Morwell, in my electorate, and that was the \$15 million Latrobe Valley Industry and Infrastructure Fund. My counterpart in the lower house, Russell Northe, the member for Morwell, cannot sing highly enough the praises for this undertaking. Through this important program the coalition supported local businesses to grow and expand, and most importantly it created new jobs. More than 40 businesses were successful in securing funding through the program, and around 1100 jobs were created, but what was truly impressive was that the company's own investment in those projects leveraged around \$93 million worth of additional investment into the region.

Labor is yet to announce a fund such as the Regional Growth Fund that would be as beneficial for people and businesses in the Latrobe Valley. It would be a shame if under the Labor government this type of program were not taken up, embraced and used in a similar way.

Sometimes it is the smaller projects that can make a difference in rural and regional Victoria — for example, hall upgrades, improvements to playgrounds, parks and gardens, and funding for community hubs, bridges and footpaths. All these projects are important to rural Victorians, and I hope they are not forgotten. I have before me a massive document listing all the local government and industry funding that the coalition government provided through the Regional Growth Fund. The benefits the program would bring to my electorate are enormous. I really hope that with the bill before the house, which I endorse, and the amendments the government is proposing our small country towns, our regional areas, are not forgotten and that they can grow and prosper.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015 and state from the outset that the bill before us today fulfils an election commitment. It always gives me great pleasure to speak in this place on election commitments, as they are promises made to the people of Victoria — promises that the Andrews Labor government is, and will continue, delivering. These election commitments arise from the need to get rural and regional Victoria back on track.

Labor's plan for regional and rural Victoria is desperately needed. We have taken office with unemployment on the up. It was 5.3 per cent when we left office, and now it is 6.8 per cent. Youth unemployment is around 20 per cent and even higher in certain communities in western Victoria. It is a well-known fact that Labor is committed to jobs. That is why we made these election promises and why we will deliver on them. The former government not only sat on its hands while jobs disappeared from rural and regional Victoria but actively facilitated skills destruction by taking the axe to TAFE funding. Its members facilitated jobs destruction with their callous attitude towards regional and rural Victoria, and we could see them sitting by during the demise of manufacturing here in Victoria. That is not the way to drive growth. It is not the way to drive an economy. It is not the way to create jobs. And it is certainly not the way to keep young people in our communities in regional Victoria.

Rural and regional Victoria accounts for 25 per cent of the state's population and yet receives 4 per cent of the funds for major projects. That is simply not good enough. Regional Victoria deserves better, and that is what is bill all about — giving the support that families, communities and companies in regional Victoria deserve from a state government.

I have read some of the contributions made to the debate on this bill in the other place. It seems there is some sort of misapprehension by colleagues of those opposite that this bill is just a rebranding exercise. It is simply not a rebranding exercise. This bill is about making government work more efficiently for people in rural and regional Victoria. It is aimed at supporting major projects, creating jobs and industries of the future, and building stronger communities. This bill does that by restoring the key economic functions of Regional Development Victoria — creating jobs and investment — and not hiding it away as a sub-function of planning, which was the case under the previous government.

Jobs and growth are front and centre of our promise to regional Victoria, and we intend to keep them there and to keep them alive. The path to access funds is simplified by one unified bill for rural and regional Victoria. This simplified pathway gives access to three separate funds: the \$250 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, the \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund and the \$50 million Stronger Regional Communities plan. I will take a minute to outline these machinery changes.

First, the failed Regional Growth Fund is being repealed to enable a transition to new funding arrangements that will allow the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund to operate flexibly under the Regional Development Victoria Act 2002. The Regional Development Victoria (RDV) act is being amended to incorporate provisions for regional development funding previously covered under the Regional Growth Fund Act 2011. The RDV act is being amended to ensure that the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund can be used for better infrastructure, facilities or services, strengthening the economic, social or environmental base of communities, creating jobs and career opportunities for regional Victorians, and supporting the development of local projects or any other project to support the economic or community development that is so sorely needed in regional Victoria. These changes make it easier for RDV to restore its core function of creating jobs and investment in rural and regional Victoria.

Some other minor changes are worth noting not so much for what they do but for the intent of what they deliver. The bill amends the RDV act to replace the Regional Policy Advisory Committee with a Regional Development Advisory Committee. The broad functions are outlined in the bill. Current provisions for membership and meeting arrangements are retained. However, I note the insertion of the word 'development' in place of 'policy'. It was pretty clear

from the last government that regional policy consisted of, I would argue, really nothing, except to slash jobs in TAFE and stand idly by whilst unemployment rates soared right across the state. This bill is setting about changing that.

Whilst I am outlining some of the more minor changes in the bill that go to the intent of Labor's Back on Track plan for rural and regional Victoria, it is probably important to note that 'rural and regional Victoria' will be substituted for 'regional Victoria'. It may be a name change but it is backed up by actions. An amount of \$70 million from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund is reserved for the state's 38 rural councils. Another \$100 million is reserved for the state's 10 biggest regional cities. All of that is the big picture. But let us look at some of the specifics for my electorate of Western Victoria Region.

From the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund there will be a \$31.5 million contribution to redevelop not just Eureka Stadium but the Ballarat sports precinct. On top of funding a new grandstand, AFL-standard lights and a video scoreboard for Eureka Stadium, this money will upgrade the Wendouree Sports and Events Centre, relocate and upgrade the Ballarat showgrounds and provide upgrades to CE Brown Reserve.

Country Victorians deserve first-class facilities, and Labor will deliver them. This fund makes an \$8 million contribution to the \$12.5 million *Blood on the Southern Cross* sound and light show at Sovereign Hill. If members opposite want to visit Ballarat and see the wonderful progress being made in regional and rural Victoria under this bill, they need only go and visit the Ballarat railway station, where they will be greeted with a \$25 million redevelopment of that station. They can use it as a step off to visit the Grampians and see the completed Grampians peaks trail, which I understand the Minister for Regional Development, Ms Jaala Pulford, will officially open on Friday.

The Regional Infrastructure Development Fund will create jobs and make lasting infrastructure improvements that will bring tourist dollars into regional Victoria. There will be new trail infrastructure and hike camps to the value of \$19 million. The Geelong Performing Arts Centre will receive \$30 million, which will create a cabaret theatre, add two more dance studios and improve disability access. Close to my home, the Leopold Community Hub will receive \$3 million for a library, community meeting rooms, multipurpose spaces and a soundproof room for musicians to use.

I refer now to the Regional Jobs Fund. Members opposite make plenty of noise about jobs but they tend to focus on the jobs they like. The former Premier, the member for South-West Coast in the Assembly, gave the nod to the tinfoil hat brigade and destroyed the Victorian wind farm industry. Keppel Prince, in the former Premier's own electorate, had to let many workers go as he backed former Premier Baillieu's absurd wind farm policies.

Science is not a strong suit for those opposite, but Labor believes in science. Labor believes in science to the point where it has supported the development of the Stawell particle physics laboratory to the tune of \$1.75 million to do groundbreaking research into dark matter. It will be the only site of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, and it will create an estimated 41 jobs and put over \$40 million into the local economy.

Support for Stawell does not stop there. There is \$500 000 for the Frewstall lamb and sheep processing facility, which will create a further 30 jobs. This bill is about getting our regions back to work. The wine industry receives \$1 million for the Wine Victoria strategy. In Geelong, where the closing of the car industry looms, the Andrews government is taking action. Where the previous government said it was all too hard, Labor recognises that action has to be taken now. Manufacturing is still worth 42 per cent of Geelong's economic output, or \$10 billion.

The Regional Jobs Fund has an extra \$7.5 million for the Geelong Regional Innovation and Investment Fund, taking the state's contribution to \$12 million. This money is for projects focused on bringing new jobs to Geelong. There is \$5 million for a Victorian defence procurement office in Geelong as well, and this office will be dedicated to marketing the skill and capability of Geelong and Victorian manufacturers to national and international defence contractors.

Once again on the theme of science, the Andrews Labor government will partner with Deakin University, and the Regional Jobs Fund will contribute \$3 million towards a \$30 million manufacturing hub in Geelong. This is just some of what can be achieved when Regional Development Victoria has jobs and growth as its core function. With all the jobs and investment the Andrews government will put into regional Victoria, life will return to country Victoria. The Stronger Regional Communities plan has \$50 million for attracting young people and families. Already we have announced \$3.5 million to support Rural Councils Victoria, and \$600 000 has been allocated to sponsor the Stawell Gift to secure its future.

In conclusion, this bill simplifies the funding for rural and regional Victoria. It simplifies the bureaucratic path. It also puts jobs and growth at the centre of RDV functions. It involves families. It involves students, companies and communities in their future. It remembers, recognises and responds to the vital contribution that regional and rural Victoria make to this state. It is not just one-off grants; it is a series of investments and it is seed capital for sustainable growth. Rural and regional Victorians deserve better than the constant cuts and shrugs of 'all too hard' that came their way over the last four years. This bill is a first step to getting rural and regional Victoria back on track. This bill is an election promise to the people who live outside of Melbourne. This bill is a promise kept, and I commend this bill to the house.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015. This bill amends the Regional Development Victoria Act 2002 to establish the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund and a Regional Development Advisory Committee. The bill repeals the act that was created by the former government to establish the Regional Growth Fund in 2011, but this bill very much copies the Regional Growth Fund and just calls it another name.

Under the Regional Growth Fund we had an advisory committee that was called the Regional Policy Advisory Committee. That committee will be disbanded, and we will have a Regional Development Advisory Committee. As you can see, it really is just a copy of the previous legislation — rebadged, renamed and putting in place a different advisory committee that still has the same structure for advising government on the distribution of those funds.

We have a number of concerns with this bill. The major concern I have with this bill is that Labor appears to be using this \$500 million to substitute funding for regional projects out of this fund for mainstream funding. This should not be about replacement funding; the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund is meant to be additional funding available to regional communities, not substitute funding that is used instead of funding from mainstream sources.

The best example is the Stawell Gift. That was funded by the previous coalition government out of the sports budget — \$600 000 for a race in Stawell. It is a very important race that has become a feature of our Easter weekends over many decades. As I said, that was funded out of sport. The Labor Party has now said that that will be funded out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. Labor is not taking the \$600 000

from sport and putting it in in addition to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund; it is funding it out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund instead of funding it out of sport. The \$600 000 stays in sport, to be spent in metropolitan areas, and \$600 000 will come out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to pay for the sponsorship of that race. It is a very worthwhile sponsorship, but it should still be paid for out of the sports budget. As I said, the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund should be additional funding available to regional Victoria. It should be money that is in addition to the mainstream funding, not money that exists instead of mainstream funding.

A number of other projects are listed that could have been funded out of health but which Labor will instead fund out of this fund. There is \$1 million for the dental laboratory in the Latrobe Valley, \$19 million to build the Grampians peaks trail that could have been funded out of the environment fund and \$30 million for a sporting precinct in Ballarat that could have been funded out of sport, and that funding will come out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and not out of mainstream funding.

This Friday, 29 May, marks six months since the election. That means the Andrews Labor government has been in power for six months, yet it has only just introduced this legislation in the Parliament. In contrast to this, the coalition government brought the Regional Growth Fund bill before this house in its first 100 days in government, and it did that because it understood the needs of regional Victoria. It also understood how regional Victoria had been ignored for 11 years under the Bracks and Brumby governments, and it understood the need for urgent investment in regional communities.

Under the former government the Regional Growth Fund funded around 1800 projects. Five hundred million dollars was allocated to those projects, and that leveraged a further \$2 billion worth of investment into rural and regional Victoria. These projects also created around 23 000 jobs across rural and regional Victoria. Our Regional Growth Fund is something we are very proud of. Those 23 000 jobs were made up of 6000 direct full-time jobs, around 12 000 indirect jobs and around 5000 construction jobs. There was economic activity happening right throughout country Victoria.

One of the features that made the former government's Regional Growth Fund so successful was the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. The fund provided money to local government, and local government decided how the money would be spent. This was particularly important for smaller municipalities, which

quite often struggle to have funds available for contributive payments towards grant applications.

In my portfolio of early childhood development many of the children's facilities that are being built now are a result of funding that we provided during the four years we were in government with grants from the Children's Facilities Capital Fund. Under that fund there was an essential matching component, and much of the money for that came from things like the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. That fund assisted smaller communities to get that matching money, and it allowed local governments to increase their contributions so they could apply for bigger grants.

We are seeing magnificent children's centres being built right throughout Victoria because our government invested in children's infrastructure not only through the \$135 million available for early childhood development but also through the additional money that was provided through the Regional Growth Fund. I am particularly proud of two of the centres. One in Donald has already opened; the other, in Tallangatta, is being built. These are two of our more cash-strapped shires, yet they have built magnificent children's centres because of money that was made available to regional Victoria through those funds. They are providing great opportunities for families in those areas.

The former government's Regional Growth Fund provided many great opportunities across my electorate, whether it be in Bendigo, Mildura, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Shepparton or some of the many other areas that make up the almost half of Victoria that comprises Northern Victoria Region. The art gallery expansion in Bendigo is one project that comes to mind. That is a project that is really driving economic growth and tourism in Bendigo. It has allowed for some fantastic exhibitions to come to the city. The one that comes to my mind, because it was displayed in part of the new area of the gallery last year, is the Body Beautiful in Ancient Greece exhibition and the ancient Greek sculptures that were included in it. That was a fantastic exhibition, a fantastic outcome and a fantastic cultural experience for people in regional Victoria, but it also brought tourism from Melbourne and interstate to our regional city of Bendigo.

Pactum Dairy Group in Shepparton is another great example of what investment can do to drive an industry in regional Victoria. Pactum is now growing exponentially. It produces ultra-high temperature milk for export into the Chinese market. Pactum is providing greater opportunities for employment in Shepparton but also opportunities for our farmers to increase milk production and drive that additional trade into China.

One of the investments that makes me most proud is the \$22 million the former government provided to SPC. As we know, SPC, or the Shepparton Preserving Company, is an iconic brand in Victoria. It is a very important business for Shepparton. There was a real chance that Coca-Cola Amatil was about to exit from Shepparton and close down SPC. This would have meant the loss of about 500 direct jobs at SPC and almost 3000 jobs in the broader community in Shepparton. Our community was desperate to save SPC.

My colleagues Jeanette Powell, the former member for Shepparton in the Assembly, and Sharman Stone, the federal member for Murray, and I worked extremely hard to ensure that SPC and its future in Shepparton were secured. I would like to thank the former Premier, Denis Napthine, the member for South-West Coast in the Assembly, because he listened. He came to Shepparton and he listened to the local government, he listened to the workers of SPC, he listened to Coca-Cola Amatil and he listened to our growers, and he came up with a package that saved that company and enabled it to go on to bigger and better things. I have never been as proud as a member of Parliament as I was to stand beside our Premier, Denis Napthine, the day we made that announcement. If you have seen the photos, you will see that the grin could not be wiped off my face.

The new line opened last week, and the new Premier, Daniel Andrews, came to town to open it. He did not pay tribute to the former government in doing that. He tried to claim credit for the current government, but what he should do is go online and read some of the social media comment around that. It is a pity he has not been in town to hear what people are saying about his performance, because he did not do himself any favours. People are saying, 'How dare he try to claim the credit'.

My concerns about this government are that it will use this fund to finance many other projects that should be funded through departments like health and sport and education. I spoke about this earlier, and there is a real concern that this fund will contain only \$500 million for country Victoria with the rest of the money being available to metropolitan Melbourne.

I am also concerned that once again Labor will use government funds to pork-barrel its own electorates and marginal seats and that Liberal and Nationals seats will once again miss out. This is a real concern, and the concern is valid given what happened during the election.

Labor did not make one election commitment to 5 of the 11 districts in northern Victoria. I am talking about the seats of Mildura, Murray Plains, Shepparton, Benambra and Eildon, and guess what! Prior to the election those seats were all held by Liberal or Nationals representatives. The seat of Shepparton has gone to an Independent, not to Labor — Labor's vote actually fell in Shepparton. The attitude of Labor, which is to ignore these seats, has been entrenched in its latest budget. Labor's rural and regional budget information paper has a map on page 2 and 3 which shows that Labor has not one project in this budget going to any of the five electorates I have named. I am also concerned that Labor's entrenched position is not to fund these electorates.

When we look at the budget papers we also see that almost half of the \$500 million in the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund has already been committed, so there is not a lot left to be committed over the next three and a half years. I call on the Premier to put more money into this regional development fund and to govern for all Victorians, as he promised to do at the election. The Premier also needs to instruct his ministers to govern for all Victorians and to fund projects across all electorates. Regardless of whether those electorates are marginal or held by the Liberals or The Nationals, the government must invest in country Victoria, because country Victorians deserve better than they got under the Bracks and Brumby governments. This government will go the same way of losing country Victorians' confidence if it does not fund additional projects in regional Victoria.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise, as others have done, to speak to the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015. As Ms Lovell and others have said, this bill is about a change of name — perhaps without the grunt — of the former Regional Growth Fund that the coalition government so very well established during its term and, as others have said, both in this house and the other place, that was a great model for a regional development program. The Regional Growth Fund assisted country communities right across Victoria by providing funding through the Local Government Infrastructure Fund and the Putting Locals First Fund, which helped develop very strong communities across rural and regional Victoria.

The former coalition government made 1426 targeted funding decisions over the four-year period, which was a total investment of nearly \$500 million into 1800 projects that leveraged another \$2 billion worth of investment. When talking about investment, we can focus on the things which are important, like return on

investment. For every dollar invested by the Napthine coalition government, another \$3 of investment was secured. That is a very good rate of return in anyone's language. The coalition created over 2300 jobs across regional and country Victoria, of which 6000 were direct full-time jobs, nearly 1200 were indirect jobs and about 5000 were construction jobs, which particularly helped the funding.

About a week and a half ago I spent the day with Ms Lovell in Shepparton, which is a beautiful regional city. I learnt a lot in my time there, but I was reminded of the \$22 million that, under Ms Lovell's stewardship and with the support of then Premier Napthine and Deputy Premier Ryan, helped to put together a package to keep SPC Ardmona in Shepparton and make sure that all those jobs were secured. As a creative model, it was a great initiative and innovation to help SPC. As Ms Lovell pointed out, SPC celebrated the opening of a new line only last week. Ms Lovell is to be congratulated for her stewardship of and support for the regional city of Shepparton.

Ms Lovell and I also visited the Pactum Dairy Group plant in Shepparton, a new packaging plant that was built principally to produce and package UHT milk. It is a great development, and things are going very well there in terms of export opportunities. Victorian product is being exported through the great work of the Regional Growth Fund, developed by the Napthine coalition government.

We also met with people at Bega Cheese, which is doing some amazing things in China and is another example of things that were supported by the previous Napthine coalition government.

A striking message came out of our time in Shepparton — that is, that in the budget there is nothing for Shepparton. There is no support for Shepparton — not a dollar of new money for the people of Shepparton, an area with a youth unemployment rate of 23.1 per cent and where one in every five families is jobless. While the people are crying out for opportunity, there is nothing in the state budget for Shepparton. I say this bill could be a bit of a furphy. It could be another example of the Labor government of Premier Daniel Andrews being seen to be doing something but not actually delivering on doing anything.

Today we are debating the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill. What is interesting is that in the title of this bill is the word 'jobs', but we are yet to see from Daniel Andrews and his friends in the Labor Party any significant jobs plan for Victoria. In their time in office — since

29 November — Victoria has lost over 8000 jobs. Labor is already going backwards in its jobs target, but there is no plan. That is the thing that is absent — six months in this job, and there is no plan.

We are looking for something more to celebrate than a review of Regional Development Victoria, to be chaired by former Premier John Brumby — a jobs for their mates inquiry. The only jobs I think Daniel Andrews and his team are worried about are their own. There is no greater example of that than this week itself, which I will not go into, because we all know what I am talking about. It seems that the whole focus of the Victorian government is not new jobs or job security for the people of Victoria, but on its own members' jobs. That is where the government's focus is, and that in itself is a shame. We want less talk and more action from this government, because quite frankly Victorians are sick of its rhetoric.

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — I rise to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Amendment (Jobs and Infrastructure) Bill 2015. Investment in regional Victoria is always very welcome; however, I am quite concerned about some of the aspects of this bill. I have had discussions with some of my colleagues in lower house seats in western Victoria — in Lowan, Polwarth, South-West Coast, Ripon and South Barwon — where we have very hardworking local members. These discussions about what came through the budget and indeed through the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund were quite short discussions, because there is very little in the budget for these members and for the constituents in these seats.

What concerns me greatly is that not only is there very little funding but also that the funding that is there is not enough for the particular projects. My attention is drawn especially to the Ballarat basketball project, which is the indoor sports and events centre that has been spoken about for a long time in Ballarat and is critically needed. However, unfortunately what we see is a \$7 million black hole in this project from this Labor government. This project requires \$21 million of funding. The Ballarat City Council has committed \$5 million worth of funding; however, the Labor government has committed only \$9 million, leaving a gaping black hole in what is a critically important project for Ballarat.

I note also that this is a bill that speaks about jobs in regional Victoria. I know Mr Ondarchie is very well aware of the VicRoads relocation to Ballarat that was committed to by the coalition government. This bill talks about jobs in regional Victoria, and yet we see, sitting on a table gathering dust, a proposal which

would deliver 600 regional jobs and \$60 million of annual economic activity to the Ballarat CBD. That proposal is being ignored by this Labor government. I imagine the Minister for Regional Development, who lives in Ballarat, is very aware of this opportunity and its importance to a city like Ballarat.

I will go back to the Ballarat basketball project. This is a project that should deliver six courts and a show court with seating for 2000 to 3000 people. However, as a result of this funding shortfall, we are likely to see just three courts. That is not even going to meet the current demand for indoor sports in Ballarat and is quite disappointing for the people of Ballarat. The Ballarat Miners, Ballarat Rush and the new Ballarat netball team, the Ballarat Sovereigns, deserve better. They deserve more from this Labor government than they are currently getting.

I was reminded of the coalition government's Regional Growth Fund and of the great work done through that fund. Whilst I was listening to the contributions to the debate from my fellow members, I reminisced about some of the project funding announcements I was fortunate enough to go to and about other events that were important particularly for Ballarat. I know that Mr Ondarchie has been to Morshead Park, where we witnessed Melbourne City playing Sydney Football Club in a Football Federation Australia Cup game. Unfortunately Melbourne City was unsuccessful on that occasion. This great project received \$425 000 from the Regional Growth Fund and was also able to attract the Bahraini football team to Ballarat to train prior to the Asian Football Confederation's Asian Cup, at which Australia was very successful.

I am also reminded of the wonderful inclusive playground project in Ballarat, which is to be built in Victoria Park. This fantastic project received \$500 000 from the Regional Growth Fund. The project would deliver a play space not only for those who are able-bodied and those who are disabled but for everybody to have an opportunity to play together. People with disabilities are going to be able to play with their brothers, sisters and friends who are able-bodied.

I also attended the opening of the Mars Chocolate Australia's Project Stegosaurus, which was a fabulous project.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MORRIS — No, it was not about dragons; it was a stegosaurus project. It was a solar panel project by the Mars confectionery makers in Ballarat for which there was \$1.5 million of funding. I am told this

stegosaurus project is so named because it was big and it was green. I was of the understanding that this particular project had enough solar panels to power 90 homes, but the important part of this investment was that it secured jobs for Ballarat. This \$1.5 million investment from the Regional Growth Fund would ensure the future prosperity of Mars in Ballarat and demonstrated the importance of those jobs to Ballarat.

There was also the railway redevelopment that Mr Ramsay spoke about earlier today, which provided for the commercialisation of some space at the railway precinct that was under-utilised and is now going to have the capacity to support some commercial activity within the railway precinct. There was also the \$500 000 investment in the Ballarat Technology Park which would bring 120 jobs to the Ballarat tech park, which is situated just 100 metres or so from my electorate office in Ballarat. It is a great investment to ensure the future of jobs in Ballarat.

I am concerned about whether or not this government is serious about jobs in regional Victoria. There is talk — there is even the naming of bills — to show that the government is serious about jobs in regional Victoria. However, I am very concerned about whether this government really cares about jobs in regional Victoria. Talk is cheap; what we need to see now is action. We need to see action from this government in terms of what is going to be delivered for regional Victoria. I note that Mr Drum spoke very passionately earlier today about what needs to be delivered for regional Victoria. Members opposite should take note of what Mr Drum has said, because regional Victoria has been ignored too long by Labor. It is important that all Victorians get what they should expect from government, and that is to be respected, supported and invested in as we progress.

Ms Shing interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Ms Shing is not in her place and she is continually interrupting and interjecting.

Ms Shing — My earnest apology, Acting President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I ask the chamber to allow Mr Morris to finish his contribution in silence.

Mr MORRIS — Thank you very much, Acting President, I was having trouble hearing myself think there for a moment so I do appreciate that. Thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution to the debate on this bill. I hope the Labor government takes regional Victoria seriously, because we certainly deserve it.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank all members for their contributions to this debate this afternoon. This is an important debate. The government is very committed to rebuilding confidence and restoring regional Victoria as the engine room of our state's economy. The government has done and is doing a number of things to that end. The Regional Economic Development and Services Review will be finalised soon, and I look forward to releasing the guidelines for the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund in a few weeks. The passage of this legislation is very important because it establishes the legislative framework that will govern that fund.

I take the opportunity to briefly respond to a couple of items that have been mentioned in the debate. In response to some of his comments, I indicate to Mr Drum that the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is not all that this government is doing for regional Victoria, far from it. In our new approach to industry policy and to supporting industries in Victoria a number of other initiatives will be of great value to businesses in Victoria. In addition to the \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund and as part of the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund there is \$200 million for the Future Industries Fund, which is dedicated to building the capacity of six key parts of the Victorian economy. New energy technology and food and fibre are two of those six parts that have a natural home in regional Victoria. That observation is also in part a response to Mr Barber's comments during the debate around the need to support renewable energy investments. This is of great benefit to the state, particularly our regional communities.

There is also the \$508 million Premier's Jobs and Investment Panel. The acquitting of that funding will be informed by significant contributions from some of the industry and community leaders in the Premier's advisory group. The very first piece of legislation the government introduced into this Parliament was the Back to Work Bill 2014, which includes a \$100 million commitment that is all about providing payroll tax relief to employers who are providing job opportunities to those at risk of long-term unemployment. These funds and this new approach to industry policy will also be complementary to the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund.

I note Mr Drum's comments about SPC and his observation that the former government saved SPC.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms PULFORD — They were dragged, and I want to say in response to Mr Drum that SPC was being saved from the federal Liberal-Nationals government, as it happened.

Mr Drum talked about the critically important role that Regional Development Victoria (RDV) plays in business engagement. What I can assure the house is that, unlike the former government, we will not be outsourcing business engagement. We think it is an essential part of the work of RDV. I want RDV to continue to be a first port of call for businesses in regional Victoria, including those with bright ideas, those that want to expand and those that are suffering from some hardship or that need to make some difficult decisions. In those instances RDV will be responsive to their needs.

Mr Drum made some comments about the Regional Victoria Living Expo, and we have talked about that in this place in question time and debated it in other forums. Mr Drum said the expo costs just a small amount of money. I make the point that the cost of the regional expo has been \$10 million in total, and it has been topped up with funds each year. I am interested in evaluating the effectiveness of that, and we will do this properly. The former government did not ever fully fund the regional expo, as indeed it did not fully fund a number of other things I have learnt about since coming into this role.

The way we intend to use the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund was outlined before the election and has been since, and I look forward to the passage of this legislation and the role it will play in establishing the framework within which the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund will operate. This is an important day for regional Victoria. It heralds the beginning of a new era, one that I am confident will be more responsive to regional communities and more effective in creating jobs across regional Victoria.

Earlier in the debate Mr Drum talked about the previous government's Energy for the Regions program, and I know the opposition is keen to do a little scaremongering about this. I believe it will take the rest of this term of government for us to properly fix that program, and I assure Mr Drum that we are committed to doing that.

There has been some cherrypicking in the debate about the kinds of projects that are or are not funded by either the Regional Growth Fund or the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, but I assure the house that we will use this fund to build stronger regional communities, to create jobs and to develop the infrastructure that

regional communities need. We will work with regional communities to develop a pipeline of projects that will enable us to continue to grow regional economies. We will work hard to grow jobs in agriculture and food production, and we will work hard to grow jobs in tourism in regional Victoria, which are two of the most significant sources of employment.

Around one-sixth of people who have a job in regional Victoria work in food and food production, and around one-sixth work in tourism. They are quite remarkable numbers that indicate to us the importance of supporting farmers and food processing industries to access new and growing overseas markets and also the importance of diversifying Victoria's tourism offering, investing in nature-based tourism and working with local tourism industries to ensure that new jobs — the jobs for future generations of young people in regional Victoria — are great, meaningful and sustainable jobs. I could go on forever, but I will not. I gather Mr Drum will have a question or two for me during the committee stage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Ordered to be committed later this day.

Sitting suspended 6.28 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Committed.

Committee

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! It is my understanding that there are no proposed amendments in relation to any of the clauses but that there are questions, particularly around clause 1.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Yes, and maybe one question around part 3 — particularly clause 12.

Clause 1

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — In the notes and some of the press releases we have been given in relation to the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund we have been able to derive what the fund is going to look like. We have this concept where there will be a separate fund within the fund for the 10 regional cities. That is my first question. Will there be a fund within the fund specifically for 10 regional cities?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank Mr Drum for his question. The \$500 million fund is allocated across three streams. The Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is the

overarching structure, and within that is \$250 million for the Regional Infrastructure Fund, \$200 million for the Regional Jobs Fund and \$50 million for the Stronger Regional Communities plan. Running alongside that is a commitment to provide at least \$100 million from that fund to be assigned to initiatives or projects for the 10 member groups of Regional Cities Victoria, and there is a parallel commitment to a minimum of \$70 million from the fund being committed to projects or initiatives in rural councils. This ensures an appropriate balance for all of the communities that would seek to benefit from the fund.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — This fund is for regional Victoria. The minister has accounted for \$170 million in the cities and in rural Victoria. Where is the other \$330 million going to be spent?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Those commitments for \$100 million and \$70 million to be assigned from the fund are minimums from the infrastructure stream. They are to ensure that regional cities can be confident that they are getting their share of the fund and that our smaller rural communities can be confident that they will get their share of the fund.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — If either of those two figures is the minimum, neither of them is fair. How does the minister justify those figures? If the cities only receive \$100 million out of \$500 million, or if the rural councils receive only \$70 million out of \$500 million, neither of those figures is anywhere near fair.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I am curious to know what Mr Drum's question is. Out of the \$250 million infrastructure fund component of the \$500 million, at least \$100 million will be assigned to projects in our regional cities and at least \$70 million will be assigned to rural communities, most commonly through rural councils. They are not caps; they are statements that reflect our desire to strike an appropriate balance. As Mr Drum has rightly pointed out, there is then a great deal of flexibility to respond to other proposals that arise.

As Mr Drum would know, before the election the Labor Party made a number of commitments against the fund, but it is absolutely our intention that the fund retain the flexibility that its predecessor funds had. We need to be able to respond to great opportunities that arise, opportunities that we might not yet be aware of, and we need to be able to respond to difficult challenges that we might also not be aware of.

In his contribution to the second-reading debate Mr Drum talked about the experience of the former government in relation to SPC Ardmona. I suggest that is the kind of circumstance where we would want to have flexibility in the same way the former government wanted flexibility in some aspects of its fund. Indeed the Labor government before it sought to have a degree of flexibility in its fund. I am very keen to ensure that these funds will be appropriately shared around the many communities of regional Victoria. That is what the \$100 million and \$70 million commitment represent.

I am not sure how this will be recorded in *Hansard*, but I like to think of it as \$250 million, \$200 million and \$50 million layers through the \$500 million and then to splice through those commitments of \$100 million and \$70 million. It is about ensuring balance. But I assure the house that we are very committed to ensuring that our regional communities, no matter their size, are able to access the benefits that will come from this fund.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I am a little bit confused because initially when the minister mentioned the first — —

Ms Pulford — The infrastructure fund?

Mr DRUM — No. Firstly, the minister mentioned that the \$100 million and the \$70 million would be coming out of the \$500 million. Then she said the \$100 million and the \$70 million are out of the \$200 million — —

Ms Pulford — The \$250 million.

Mr DRUM — They are just out of that. So do those limits — the \$100 million and the \$70 million — only apply out of the \$250 million bracket and not out of the \$500 million bracket?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Those commitments are around the share of infrastructure funds, but it would absolutely be my expectation that the Stronger Communities component of the fund is predominantly about meeting the needs of our smaller communities, although not exclusively. It is about supporting increased and retained population and the kind of lifestyle that our rural communities enjoy. Some of our larger regional cities in particular are in a position to ensure that those types of smaller projects are managed from within their own means, so the \$50 million Stronger Communities Fund will be of particular benefit to our smaller communities. The jobs fund component will be available to our larger populations and our smaller populations. The allocation of that fund will be based

on the greatest opportunities to create jobs across our regional and rural Victorian communities. I am very keen for this fund to reflect a balance across the different regions, as has been every minister who has held this role before me.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I am still totally confused about what the \$100 million applies to and what the \$70 million applies to. Are we talking about \$100 million out of the \$500 million? Are we talking about \$100 million out of the \$250 million? Are we talking about \$100 million out of the \$200 million? Or if you spend all of the \$50 million on the rural councils, that means you really only have to spend \$20 million out of \$450 million in the rural sector. You can spend \$430 million in the 10 cities; is that what the minister is saying?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — No. The minimum of \$100 million in the regional cities and the minimum of \$70 million in the rural councils is from the infrastructure fund part — —

Mr Drum — The \$250 million?

Ms PULFORD — The \$250 million; that is right. The \$250 million will have at least \$100 million spent in the cities and \$70 million in the smaller rural communities. As Mr Drum will appreciate, that \$170 million does not add up to \$250 million. Those commitments are a reflection of our desire to strike the right balance. But I think it is important for this fund to retain flexibility. Mr Drum will appreciate that the government made a commitment against this fund of \$19 million for the Grampians peaks trail.

If what Mr Drum is getting at is that he is wanting to make the claim that we are putting all of the commitment — that \$70 million threshold for rural communities — into one or two things and leave everybody else out, let me assure Mr Drum that that is absolutely not the case. That is a significant project. It runs across five municipalities, possibly six. It is a significant project, but my expectation is that the funds will be able to support the needs and aspirations of regional cities and the need aspirations of our rural councils simultaneously.

The regional cities group, as members may well be aware, is comprised of the municipalities that represent our 10 largest cities in Victoria. They have done some policy and advocacy work together and over a number of years now have demonstrated the benefits of renewal and development activity in their CBDs. It is my expectation that the focus of our work in supporting

infrastructure projects in the regional cities would be complementary to their aspirations in this regard.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — What is the minister's expectation that these grants that are attributed to the regional cities and the rural councils will be leveraged? What is the expectation of the leveraging or the matching dollars?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank Mr Drum for his further question. The guidelines for the fund will be released before the fund's operation commences on 1 July, but I am keen for these funds to be used to maximum effect. Over a number of years a very successful model has been used in Victoria of seeking partnership funding with industry and with other tiers of government, and I would certainly want that to continue.

I can give Mr Drum an example from his own electorate, which is the Aspire Foundation project in Bendigo, with which Mr Drum is no doubt familiar. Our commitment to that project was for \$5 million. The project components of the Aspire Foundation are also seeking matching funding from the commonwealth government. The project was the subject of an application against round 1 of the federal government's National Stronger Regions program. It was unsuccessful, but the foundation is very keen to press on.

Indeed Regional Development Victoria is working with the commonwealth government in support of a number of projects that the federal government chose not to fund last week. It is our hope that any deficiencies in those applications, or perhaps just a position further up in the queue, can occur and that those projects will be submitted as part of round 2 of Stronger Regions. A project like the Aspire project has a local funding component, a federal government funding component and state government funding. This is an important way for us to get the best possible value out of our regional grants programs.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister. But without the guidelines the minister is unable to tell us whether or not some of our rural councils will need matching funding for their grants, whether they may be gifted 100 per cent of these grants or whether the regional cities will have dollar for dollar. The minister is unable to tell us that until the guidelines are handed down; is that right?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Yes. The guidelines are being finalised and will be released prior to 1 July. Both the

department and I, and our people at Regional Development Victoria, are consulting and working very closely with our local councils so that we can strike the right balance to ensure that the needs of these communities are met.

As Mr Drum would appreciate, the capacity of rural councils is a greatly varied thing. We are talking about 38 different organisations. Some are rapidly growing, and some are remotely located and have significant challenges around asset renewal and a small and — in some parts of this state — declining population to support what they do. It would be a very crude thing to design a program that assumed that Greater Geelong City Council, the largest, and perhaps Pyrenees Shire Council, one of the smaller rural shires, have the same needs and need the same kind of support for their projects. But the programs will be sympathetic to those considerations.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister. As the guidelines are yet to be handed down, what will happen to some of the projects that have already been announced if the guidelines come out and prohibit the government from spending money in other core portfolios?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Can Mr Drum repeat that?

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — For instance, if the guidelines that are handed down by the Brumby review prohibit this fund being used in a way that simply replaces spending in core portfolios that have their own budgets — such as for building schools or roads, when there are already transport, school and health budgets — but such projects have already been announced, how will those projects be funded?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — The Regional Economic Development and Services Review, for which John Brumby is the chair of the external advisory board, is not the group writing the guidelines; I will be approving the guidelines, and they are being developed with the assistance of our wonderful team at Regional Development Victoria. The review is separate. The significant policy thinking and widespread consultation that has gone into the review and the thinking that is evolving through that process will absolutely inform our thinking going through. But John Brumby is not writing the guidelines.

In response to the other part of Mr Drum's question, the fund will not be used for core services that would traditionally be funded through other portfolios. As he

would be aware, significant projects are appropriate things to fund through regional funds. At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing I presented a list of a number of sporting projects and a number of arts projects that have been funded under the Regional Growth Fund — some small and some large. They are many and varied projects that it could perhaps be asserted ought to have come out of the sport and recreation or arts funding pools, and so on. But the projects we will support through the allocation of the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund will be the types of projects that are important for regional communities, important for developing their economies and reflective of the needs and aspirations of those communities.

For example, the Geelong Performing Arts Centre is a project that we have committed to against the fund. This project drives significant visitor numbers to Geelong. It is also consistent with that city's aspirations around the transformation of its CBD. It is very much in keeping with both the economic needs of Geelong and the desires of the community. But I will assure Mr Drum that we will be delivering on each and every one of the election commitments that were made against the fund. There are 34 commitments and 20 projects, and work is already well underway on many, if not all, of them.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — An amount of \$25 million is allocated to A New Future in Regional Victoria Fund, focused on creating more training opportunities closer to home. Is this going to involve an investment in TAFE courses or registered training organisations (RTOs)?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — No, the TAFE Rescue Fund, which is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Training and Skills, Steve Herbert, is the government's fund for repairing TAFE.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — How does the minister, with the \$25 million fund for training closer to home, intend to achieve the goals of creating more training opportunities closer to home if she is not going to be investing in our RTOs or in TAFE courses?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — As Mr Drum would appreciate, the devastating cuts of the former government to TAFE had a more profound impact in regional and rural communities than they did in Melbourne. That is not to diminish the impact of the TAFE cuts in Melbourne; they were dramatic, they were severe and they had a profound effect as well. But when kids cannot get to the next suburb on the next train to do their course, then

they have substantially fewer options. It was the country campuses of our regional TAFEs that closed, and I would challenge anyone to refute the claim that this had a more dramatic effect in the country than it did in Melbourne.

We are very keen to develop partnerships between industry and training organisations. We are very keen to work with industry to ensure that it is providing training opportunities to young people in regional Victoria. The educational outcomes in regional Victoria are consistently poorer than educational outcomes for people in larger cities. This is particularly the case in some parts of the state. Mr Drum talked about Maryborough in his contribution to the second-reading debate. I know Mr Purcell has a longstanding concern about the very low year 12 attainment rates in the south-west.

We are committed to providing further training opportunities and doing that in partnership with industry, but I assure Mr Drum that this is not the money the government committed to rebuilding Victoria's TAFE system after the devastating cuts of the former government. That is Mr Herbert's TAFE Rescue Fund.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — In relation to the \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund, will the government be able to support capital projects that create effectiveness, efficiencies and competitiveness yet due to mechanisation do not create new jobs?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — The purpose of the Regional Jobs Fund stream of the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is to create jobs, so I imagine that there will be circumstances where the best possible use of that fund will be to retain jobs that might be about to go otherwise. Again I refer to the member's SPC Ardmona example from earlier in the evening. The purpose of this part of the fund is to create jobs, and that would be my expectation of where those funds will go.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — But the minister is effectively opening the door for many of the co-investments that we now make in regional Victoria where an industry is committing large aspects of its funds — and we as a government will be in there with it — but many of these investments are based around effectiveness and efficiencies, not necessarily around new jobs because of the mechanisation and the robots that are now coming into our manufacturing processes. I hope the minister is leaving the door open for co-investment with industry where jobs may not be the end result.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Our focus will be on creating jobs for people, not robots.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Again, in relation to the \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund, the government is going to establish eight business centres in regional Victoria. Can the minister tell me where they will be located?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — This is one aspect of the application of the funds that will be informed by the work of the regional review. We had not determined before the election where those centres will be, but we will ensure that they are in the places where they are most needed.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — The government has not done much, has it? In all honesty, it has not done much. If the minister cannot tell me where the business centres are going to be located, can she tell me if it is her expectation that they will have business engagement key performance indicators applied to them in the same way that the current business engagement sector of Regional Development Victoria (RDV) has KPIs about how many businesses it meets per annum?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Key performance indicators for RDV staff are a management tool that is predominantly a matter for the chief executive of Regional Development Victoria. On the question of business engagement, though, I expect Regional Development Victoria to be very actively engaged with our business community, to be available and to be responsive. One thing that I can assure Mr Drum is that, unlike the former government, we will not be outsourcing business engagement. I think this is a core function of Regional Development Victoria, and I can assure the member that, unlike the former government, we will not be outsourcing it.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Can the minister outline what she would expect the core activity of these business centres to be?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I think there is a great opportunity for us to increasingly provide a single point of entry to government for the business community, so our business engagement centres ought to be access points for information about regional funds, how to access regional jobs funds and grants to grow jobs in regional Victoria. I think it would be a very valuable thing if over time people could increasingly have a one-stop shop experience of government services. I am in no

doubt that that is easier said than done, but when I talk to members of the business community they do not want to have 50 business cards on their desks for different people they can talk to in government. They want one person to go to who can help fix the many and varied problems they may have or for interactions they may require with government.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Thank you very much for that answer. Can the minister explain how anything she has said in the last 2 minutes differs from the work that is currently done by the business engagement sector within all of our Regional Development Victoria offices right now — just one thing that is different?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Just one thing? We will not be outsourcing business engagement like Mr Drum's lot did.

Mr Ramsay — On a point of order, Deputy President, I just need guidance — not clarification as I understand I am not allowed to use that word. I would like to ask a question in relation to clause 12 of the bill.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — We are still on clause 1.

Mr Ramsay — We are still on clause 1? I was a bit confused, because there were a lot of questions.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Yes, there were a lot of questions from Mr Drum, but we are on clause 1.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Is the minister able to give me one difference between the work that is being carried out currently by our business engagement offices and the work that she has just explained she expects will be done by the new regional centres? Can she tell me where she is going to make a difference, because she has just explained the work that has been going on for the last seven years?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I gather I am not allowed to get involved in debating here, am I?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Correct.

Ms PULFORD — The former government's approach to business engagement was hands off compared to what I expect.

Mr Drum — Who told you that?

Ms PULFORD — Everybody, over four years — that is who told me that. We will be much more active

in our engagement with the business community. Our regional business centres will be places that industry can go to to engage with people who are able to fix problems, point them in the direction of opportunities to engage with government, to access grants under the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund and also the many other aspects of our industry policy — the other funds I referred to in the second-reading debate earlier this evening, which members are familiar with so I probably do not need to go into them again.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — How many staff does the minister anticipate being placed in each region?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — We will not be reducing the staffing numbers that provide Victorian government services to the communities in regional Victoria, unlike the former government, which with its sustainable government initiative stripped all manner of staffing resources from regional communities.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — With all respect, Deputy President, the minister did not answer the question: how many staff will each of the regions have? How many staff will each of the centres have in each of the regions?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Mr Drum asked how many staff would each of the regions have without specifying — —

Mr Drum — Sorry, there are going to be eight business centres around regional Victoria, and the minister does not know where they are going to be. How many staff will be in each of those regional centres?

Ms PULFORD — Operational matters like the allocation of regional development staff are something that I would be inclined to leave to the chief executive of Regional Development Victoria. If that question can be answered, I will provide an answer on notice to the member. He was talking about staffing numbers in entities that have not yet been established, so I would not want to guess and mislead the house.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Again, I am sorry, but there is this concept in the wings here waiting to take flight and there will be business centres set up around the state. The minister cannot differentiate the core activities of these new business centres from the work that has been going on for the last six or seven years — not just the last four years. She has no idea how many staff will be in these offices. Therefore, I

suggest she has no idea what these offices will cost the state. The minister has not given us any indication whether we will have one or two people, with business engagement, or whether there will be a team of 10 or 15. Can the minister give us a better idea of what these business centres are likely to look like?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I understand that Mr Drum does not like the answer to the question, but asking it again is unlikely to change it. The locations of the business centres will be informed by the regional review, which I might add has received over 100 written submissions and has conducted over 70 face-to-face interviews with stakeholders who are involved or engaged in regional development. This is a substantial piece of policy work that I think will prove to be valuable in supporting our regional communities in the coming years. Because I cannot get ahead of the review and indicate where the offices will be, and also because I am the minister and not the person directly responsible for the allocation of staff within Regional Development Victoria — that is, the chief executive of Regional Development Victoria — it is a little difficult for me to answer these questions. However, as I indicated earlier, if the answer to that question exists, I will take it on notice.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Did the minister just say there were 70 submissions to the inquiry?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — No, there were more than 70 face-to-face interviews.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — And how many submissions?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — More than 100.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Is it the same inquiry the minister originally gave four days to run its course?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I announced the inquiry in February and I expect to receive a report from the external advisory board in early to mid-June — I think 12 June — so no, that is a fair bit more than four days. There has been an extensive engagement — more than 70 face-to-face interviews, more than 100 submissions. A number of the submissions are group submissions, and a number represent multiple organisations. I would encourage Mr Drum to take the time to read those. They have been published on the internet.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Again I thank the minister, but I did not ask that question. The question I asked was: is this the same inquiry for which submissions closed on the Monday following its announcement? Is this the same inquiry for which the minister then extended the time period of the submission process?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — Mr Drum was a bit slow in noticing the commencement of this review. I wrote to a very large number of organisations. I announced the review in the Parliament. We put out a media release about it. A number of organisations then sought an extension of time, and that was granted. I cannot recall now how many weeks it was, but there were many weeks during which organisations were able to make a submission. The review period was extended because of the extraordinary level of interest in doing things differently in regional development in Victoria.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister. Given the fact that local government and the business sector are linked so very closely in the regions, do you see any of the staff at the business centres being directed solely to this sector?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — This question is a little hypothetical, but no, it would not be my expectation that there would be people working in these business centres whose sole role would be to work for local government. There is a very clear and important correlation. I would expect that the work of people in the business centres would often involve a close level of engagement with local councils, but no, I do not imagine that there would be people who would be solely working on core local government work, if that is what Mr Drum is getting at.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 11 agreed to.

Clause 12

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My question to the minister is in relation to both clauses 12 and 13. Clause 12(2) talks about section 11 of the Regional Development Victoria Act being amended to refer to the new Regional Development Advisory Committee rather than the Regional Policy Advisory Committee, which is to be abolished if this bill passes this evening. My question to the minister is: I need to have an understanding of the difference between the old policy advisory committee and the work it did as against the new advisory committee and the work it is to do, given that clause 13 substitutes new section 12(2), which specifies that the Regional Development Advisory

Committee is to exercise these functions only as directed by the minister or with the minister's approval. Could the minister also advise me how the representation of that advisory committee will be made up and who might be its chair, as distinct from the chair of the previous committee?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank Mr Ramsay for his question. Prior to 2010 the regional development minister's advisory body was called the Regional Development Advisory Committee. Peter Ryan, when he was the minister, through the Regional Growth Fund Act 2011 changed the name to Regional Policy Advisory Committee. This bill changes the name back to the Regional Development Advisory Committee. This legislation is less prescriptive than the Regional Growth Fund legislation was in relation to the establishment of the advisory committee, but the purpose is similar. It is to provide a direct line of advice to me from a group that represents regional Victorian leadership. I have sought to have the legislation not be absolutely prescriptive in terms of the representation.

The former government's committee was comprised of the chairs of the five regional development advisory committees, and that would be an excellent place to start. The federal minister, Warren Truss, and I have commenced the process for the appointment of the new Regional Development Advisory Committee members, and that will certainly inform the composition of this group, but I want to have the capacity to have additional participants as well. What I certainly assure Mr Ramsay is that there will be representation from each of the regions, and I will be very keen to engage regularly and in a meaningful way with a group of esteemed regional community leaders. That is the purpose of the committee.

Clause agreed to; clause 13 agreed to.

Clause 14

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Drum indicated that he had some questions in relation to this clause.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Mr Ramsay has asked my questions — in regard to clause 12.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — The regional development advisory — —

Mr Drum — Australia committees.

Ms PULFORD — Yes, the Regional Development Australia Committees (RDAs) — if I referred to them as advisory committees, I am sorry; I misspoke — are the committees that are currently going through an application and appointment process, which is a joint process that is undertaken between myself and Warren Truss. The Victorian Regional Development Advisory Committee will be separate to that. But as the predecessor committee, the policy committee that existed with the Regional Growth Fund, took its membership from the five RDAs, it is important that there be some commonality, some link, to that group with the RDAs, although it is not my intention to be overly prescriptive in the legislation around the numbers and the composition. Again there is some work to do in ensuring that we have a good representative group that can challenge and test the government's thinking about regional development policy. There is an enormous number of people I have encountered over the years who would have an enormous amount to contribute to a committee like this.

I do not want to restrict its numbers to five, but I do think there should be some relationship between that group and the RDA committees, which are those that are the subject of joint appointment with the commonwealth government.

If there are no other questions, I thank Mr Ramsay and Mr Drum for their questions and interest in this bill.

Clause agreed to; clause 15 agreed to.

Clause 16

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I have a question for the minister in relation to new section 17(2). I referred to that new section in my contribution to the second-reading debate on this bill this afternoon. It talks about payments from the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund and says that amounts of less than \$5 million must be authorised by the minister and amounts in excess of \$5 million must be authorised by both the minister and the Treasurer. As I understand it, under new section 17(2), which deviates from responsibilities under the old Regional Growth Fund, the minister can pick and choose certain projects for funding, which could be seen as pork-barrelling, particularly as we get close to elections. I am wondering what mechanisms might be in place to safeguard against any sort of perception that the government might be investing significantly in cities — particularly larger cities — in those more marginal seats when the minister and Treasurer have absolute control of financing.

Mr Herbert — Peter Ryan won't be in charge of it. That's about good faith.

Mr RAMSAY — Mr Herbert, I don't think you're the minister at the table.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — My colleagues behind me may have been offended by the assertion that anybody might be pork-barrelling. What I can indicate for Mr Ramsay's benefit is that the arrangements that govern the decisions around the approval of grants and the allocation of funds will be the same as they have been for many years — since prior to the Regional Growth Fund. There are a number of elements to that. In addition to program guidelines that are very rigorous in the usual course of events, where projects need to align with the objectives of the fund, and then when projects are progressing — for example, the Wedderburn streetscaping project — as a project like this is done in partnership with a local council, which would be responsible for delivery of the project, there are then contracts entered into which include milestone payments for various points along the way.

In terms of the decision-making that precedes it, as has been the case now for many years, there is an interdepartmental committee that oversees recommendations. This includes the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Treasury and Finance, and the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, as well as any other department that may have an interest in a particular project. That process precedes a recommendation coming to me as the minister.

The governance around these funds also includes a six-monthly report to the expenditure review committee of cabinet. Again, this is something that has been consistently the case now for many years in Victoria. The Victorian Auditor-General is currently undertaking an audit of the Regional Growth Fund and in doing so is very engaged in the development of the guidelines for the new fund. The Auditor-General also conducted audits of regional grants funds that existed prior to the Regional Growth Fund. The continual learning that occurs through work undertaken by the Ombudsman, by the Auditor-General and by governments of all persuasions leads to ongoing and continual improvement in the governance of these funds. I would certainly assure Mr Ramsay that the checks and balances for this money will be robust, as they have been for many years over the life of many funds that have preceded this one.

Clause agreed to; clauses 17 to 20 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.**Report adopted.***Third reading***Motion agreed to.****Read third time.****STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING****Reference**

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I move:

That pursuant to sessional order 6 this house requires the environment and planning committee to inquire into and consider matters relating to the exploration, extraction, production and rehabilitation for onshore unconventional gas and present an interim report no later than 1 September 2015 and a final report no later than 1 December 2015 and, in particular, the inquiry should include, but not be limited to, the following —

- (1) the prospectivity of Victoria's geology for commercial sources of onshore unconventional gas;
- (2) the environmental, land productivity and public health risks, risk mitigations and residual risks of onshore unconventional gas activities;
- (3) the coexistence of onshore unconventional gas activities with existing land and water uses, including —
 - (a) agricultural production and domestic and export market requirements;
 - (b) the legal rights of property owners and the impact on property values; and
 - (c) any implications for local and regional development, investment and jobs;
- (4) the ability of potential onshore unconventional gas resources contributing to the state's overall energy sources including —
 - (a) an ability to provide a competitive source of energy and non-energy inputs for Victorian industries;
 - (b) an affordable energy source for domestic consumers; and
 - (c) carbon dioxide emissions from these sources;
- (5) the resource knowledge requirements and policy and regulatory safeguards that would be necessary to enable exploration and development of onshore unconventional gas resources, including —
 - (a) further scientific work to inform the effective regulation of an onshore unconventional gas

industry, including the role of industry and government, particularly in relation to rigorous monitoring and enforcement, and the effectiveness of impact mitigation responses; and

- (b) performance standards for managing environmental and health risks, including water quality, air quality, chemical use, waste disposal, land contamination and geotechnical stability;
- (6) relevant domestic and international reviews and inquiries covering the management of risks for similar industries including, but not limited to, the Victorian Auditor-General Office's report *Unconventional Gas — Managing Risks and Impacts* (contingent upon this report being presented to Parliament) and other reports generated by the Victorian community and stakeholder engagement programs.

I have had this motion on the notice paper for the last fortnight, as it was clearly the intention of the government to give these terms of reference to the environment and planning committee of this chamber for it to address the breadth of concerns that may exist within the Victorian community about the appropriate safeguards and public policy outcomes that need to be protected in terms of the exploration of gas resources in the state of Victoria. Most members of the Victorian community who have an interest in either the resource needs or the energy needs of this state and, importantly, land use management and planning, the effect on communities and on water systems in Victoria, will note that the range of issues covered within the scope of the inquiry as outlined in the motion I have just moved has been replicated in a number of places not only throughout Australia but around the world.

In many jurisdictions concerns have been expressed by communities about the potential adverse impacts of the extraction of gas resources onshore that may, by the nature of that extraction, cause downstream consequences to water quality and other undesirable outcomes to not only aquifers but also the integral stability of land. This has been a vexed issue in many jurisdictions across the globe and has led to a great degree of community concern in many places around the world. It has led to a lot of scientific analysis of the nature of both the exploration and the extraction of gas in this form. Whilst there has been extensive examination of those issues, with a lot of scientific evidence gathered, a lot of economic analysis and a lot of analysis of other impacts on the quality of the social life and fabric of agricultural communities, these are very vexed issues which warrant full examination before binding decisions are made about the framework, planning and regulatory regime for gas exploration now and into the future.

As I have indicated, this matter has a history not only in other jurisdictions but in this jurisdiction. While the previous government initially wanted to drive a pro-development exploration and extraction agenda, it listened to a range of stakeholders, including the opposition at the time, who said that we need to have additional scrutiny brought to bear on the public policy framework, assessments and community engagement appropriate to assist in the confidence that governments would have about managing the industry, managing Victoria's resources and dealing with a multiplicity of community expectations in the years to come.

The previous government ultimately succumbed to the proliferation of those issues and decided to stall the exploration of unconventional gas sources in Victoria, a measure that was supported by many members of the Victorian community, particularly in regional communities, including agricultural producers and other people who are interested in protecting the Victorian landscape and protecting their farms. They mobilised in pursuing this course.

Whilst this was temporarily halted through what was in effect a moratorium, there are many unresolved matters, including a dearth of information that had been provided to enable the community to have greater confidence about decision-making. That is why Labor in opposition committed to instigate a parliamentary inquiry on these wide-ranging matters and it has ultimately led to the path whereby I have moved this motion. We encourage the support of the Legislative Council to implement this reference today to enable that work to be completed, in the terms of the motion that I have moved, by the end of this year.

That is certainly what I have moved and what I would be supportive of, but I am also mindful of discussions that have taken place in the lead-up to this debate tonight, and I am mindful of understandings that may have been reached by my colleague the Minister for Energy and Resources in this regard. I believe some amendments that were subject to being moved in debate on this matter may be acceptable to the government. I will wait for those amendments to be moved by others in this place, but I give notice that the government is prepared to consider reasonable amendments to the motion and the reference that would go to committee. On behalf of the government I indicate that I am happy to participate in the settlement of those amendments if they are so moved.

Those who are extremely observant of the notice paper may have already noticed that the motion that I have moved this evening incorporates an appreciation that there is a foreshadowed report of the Auditor-General

on this subject and that I have moved the motion in a form to take account of any report that may be subsequently delivered by the Auditor-General during the committee's deliberations and consideration. The government does not want to pre-empt the prerogative of the Auditor-General, but if the Auditor-General does provide us with that report during the running of this inquiry, then we think it is appropriate that the committee take into account those considerations.

Government members are alive to the best advice that may be available to us, and certainly the best scientific rigour, the best economic analysis and the best assessment of not only the geological but, very importantly, the sociological and economic consequences of the platform that we need to develop to provide the Victorian community with greater confidence about gas exploration and extraction into the future.

Given that in many ways the motion could have stood on its own merits and probably in some instances did not require great explanation, I thought it was worthy for the consideration of the Council to be reminded of the community concern about these issues, the need for us to have greater confidence as the Victorian community going forward and to provide the greatest certainty through the framework that will be established and hopefully will lead to findings from the committee that has been asked to prepare that report so that the Victorian government and the Victorian community can make wise decisions about this industry and impacts upon our community and our wellbeing into the future. With those supportive words I encourage other members of the Council to send this reference to the environment and planning committee.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to rise to talk on Mr Jennings's motion, which proposes sending this issue off to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning to inquire into and consider matters relating to — and on it goes. Along with the Greens, with whom I have just been talking, I have an amendment, which I now move:

Excepting the reference to the Auditor-General's report in the final paragraph of the motion, for 'unconventional gas' (wherever occurring) substitute 'conventional and unconventional gas'.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Members should note that from here on, both the motion and the amendment will be part of the debate.

Mr DRUM — Our position on onshore gas has been a very stable one for a long period of time. We are

looking for this issue to be dealt with. In government we put a moratorium in place to ensure that a whole range of scientific research was conducted and that a whole range of issues were tried and tested. We then put in place a whole range of consultation processes to ensure that the western Victorians and the Gippslanders who live and have their own agricultural industries in the areas that are attractive as potential host properties for onshore gas exploration were properly consulted and vigorously sought out for their views.

That work was commenced while the coalition was in government last year, and a very extensive process took place, with literally hundreds of meetings in which thousands and thousands of people were talked to. A whole raft of statistics are now available to members of Parliament, enabling them to look at the results of that consultation process and obtain the views of the people who live in these regions — their current opinions on onshore gas.

What is quite stark is that a very high percentage of the people spoken to are still undecided on this issue. In the vicinity of 44 per cent of all those people are still undecided on this issue. Around 29 per cent of people are in favour of an industry, and about 27 per cent are against. A large proportion of people still want to know more about the issue and the industry. In this situation we are very glad we put the moratorium in place. We stopped this industry from progressing further.

We made it very clear that when the community was onboard, and only when the community was onboard, would we look at doing anything other than maintaining the moratorium. In government we understood that we would need the people coming to government with overwhelming support for this industry and we would need the science to be absolutely conclusive that there was no risk to the groundwater and no risk to the aquifers in the watertable.

We understand that the area of interest to the gas companies — certainly in Gippsland — is highly valuable agricultural land. We are making sure that those farmers have a right of veto over these processes going forward. We have not heard anything to the contrary or seen any reason for Victorians to change their minds. Now that the consultation report from the primary agency is back and available for us all to look at, you can see that there is still a range of questions that need to be answered. Mr Jennings is now sending this off to a committee, and we will not be opposing that motion. We do, however, want to stress that this is a very serious issue. We understand that a similar inquiry in New South Wales received somewhere in the

vicinity of 910 submissions. We are very clear on the fact that we would much rather have had this issue go to a joint house committee that was better resourced, that had more than just one staffer and that had the capacity to travel into the respective regions both here and interstate to look at other jurisdictions to see how they have worked with this industry. It would have been a perfect inquiry for the Rural and Regional Committee had the Labor Party not abolished it. However, what is done is done.

We will not be opposing this motion; however, we want to stress the point that we want to amend the motion put forward by Mr Jennings so that it talks about all onshore gas. It is a reasonably confusing issue. We hear people talking about shale gas, tight gas, conventional and unconventional gas and coal seam gas, and a lot of people are effectively not quite sure what is what, what the process of fracking entails and what processes involve BTEX chemicals — even though we have banned them from Victoria.

Again, there are a whole raft of sayings and terminology around this issue. Our amendment is simply based around simplifying the inquiry. As we send it off to the committee, we want to make sure that all onshore gas is the focus of the inquiry. We want to make sure that nothing gets left out simply because we have not used the correct terminology. By making this change and by referring to both conventional and unconventional gas, we believe we have taken the necessary steps.

Again, we would like to say that this is a very important issue. The land that is the centre of attention for this potential industry is highly profitable and highly valuable agricultural land. We will need to ensure that we take every precaution if we are going to progress this industry. If the science continues to come through with any doubts at all, then we would expect the parliamentary inquiry to come back with a very strong negative recommendation about progressing this industry. That is the seriousness we place on this inquiry going forward. With so many people undecided, we think now is the opportune time for the parliamentary committee to inquire into this issue, but it is critical that the committee get into the regions, talk to the locals and have the opportunity to look at other jurisdictions where this industry is operating.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — The Greens will support this motion. However, we have some proposed amendments, and I am happy to move them now. I move:

1. For “present an interim report no later than 1 September 2015 and a final report no later than 1 December 2015”

substitute “present an interim report no later than 1 December 2015 and a final report no later than 1 March 2016”.

2. After paragraph (3) insert —
“(4) the environmental, public health, community, land and public safety benefits of a perpetual ban on onshore unconventional gas in Victoria;”.
3. In paragraph (4) omit “(4)” and insert “(5)”.
4. In paragraph (5) omit “(5)” and insert “(6)”.
5. In paragraph (5) insert “best practice” after “(b)”.
6. In subparagraph (5)(a) for “responses; and” substitute “responses;”
7. After subparagraph (5)(b) insert —
“(c) the capacity of existing regulators to undertake regular, intensive monitoring and risk management of unconventional gas projects;”.
8. After paragraph (5) insert —
“(7) the potential economic and social costs, in the short and long term, of environmental disaster response, pollution management, compensation to affected landholders, environmental impacts and site rehabilitation;”.
9. In paragraph (6) omit “(6)” and insert “(8)”.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! It should be pointed out to members that not only will Mr Drum’s amendment be part of this debate but Mr Barber’s amendments will be as well.

Mr BARBER — I gather that these amendments have been the subject of some discussion between other members of my party and the minister from the lower house. I hope they prove acceptable to the government in the form in which they have been drafted.

The Greens are very clear about their position on the issue of unconventional gas. Victoria does not need this industry, and Victoria does not want this industry. There are too many risks during the production phase, including potential damage to soil, water and air and loss of rural amenity. However, even if those risks were to be wished away, at the end of the day what we are proposing here is to open up a massive new fossil fuel-driven industry at a time when we must be moving to zero emissions as fast as possible.

We have seen some rapid evolution in the coalition’s position on this issue. During its time in government it was well and truly on the move. It had a former federal Liberal politician, Peter Reith, out there talking to industry and reluctantly talking to the community, but

that process and that particular piece of consultation had to be put on hold and replaced with another round of consultations. I believe the statistics Mr Drum was quoting earlier may have been statistics from his walk-in public consultation groups that were conducted in various parts of the state. More groups had to be added as community demand rose.

However, the fact is that there is another set of statistics that The Nationals have been poring over lately and those are the electoral statistics from New South Wales and Victoria. One of Mr Drum’s Nationals candidates who had his hand up for the seat of Ballina is a statistic, with the seat having been turned over to the Greens. Elsewhere in Victoria, whether it was in the recent South Gippsland by-election or in the main election itself, it is absolutely clear that this issue has so many people concerned that they have switched their votes, in some cases directly from The Nationals to the Greens. They have good reason to be concerned. Until now all we have had is a series of assurances from the industry and various governments at various levels that everything is going to be okay. They have not met their burden of proof by any means.

While The Nationals are in rapid retreat on this issue, we know what Labor’s position is. Its position is that it does not know, and therefore it is going to have an inquiry. When we first read the terms of reference for this inquiry we were very concerned that it appears to be implicit that the industry will be going ahead. A whole series of inquiries into how to regulate the industry were outlined, but nowhere was it explicitly stated that a threshold question for the committee would be: do we or do we not want this industry? That has been the Greens position. There has been a little bit of outflanking by The Nationals, and Labor is leaving it with us to have an inquiry. That inquiry better be a doozy, because Labor is under pressure from all over the place to hurry up and get on with developing unconventional gas across the land area of Victoria.

First of all Labor has its federal shadow resources minister, that notorious climate change denier Mr Gary Gray, who has now recanted and said that his previous views were all youthful indiscretion. When he was not bashing up the Greens he said:

Community concerns about coal seam gas activities have led to bipartisan CSG moratoria in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania.

This is a trend I understand, but the scientific evidence argues that the technical challenges and risks can be managed through a well-designed environmental regulatory regime, underpinned by effective monitoring and enforcement of compliance.

Mr Gray has made up his mind. He says we should have an industry. He says we can regulate all those problems and that it will be fine.

Hard on his heels of course is Mr Martin Ferguson, a former federal resources minister and now a bit of a free agent who chose to stick his nose in during the New South Wales state election on behalf of his clients, leading to a headline in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 March that said 'NSW state election 2015: Martin Ferguson steps up attack on Luke Foley over CSG'. Luke Foley is the New South Wales opposition leader — Mr Ferguson's state Labor mate — and was trying to become Premier. The article says:

Martin Ferguson, a former trade union chief and resources minister in the Rudd-Gillard Labor governments, says he has no plans to exit Labor despite attacking his party's coal seam gas policies in NSW.

In the middle of the New South Wales election Mr Ferguson helpfully used a speech at a gas conference to make this suggestion, quoted in the article:

I have no intention of leaving the Labor Party ...

The article goes on to say:

'Luke Foley's campaign has been tarnished by rank opportunism and blatant scaremongering', Mr Ferguson told the Australian Domestic Gas Outlook conference.

By threatening to kill the Santos Pilliga project, Luke Foley is sending a very clear message that he doesn't care about jobs or energy security for NSW ...

...

'If Luke Foley actually loses on Saturday, then I think he should revisit his opposition to the sell-off —

of the power assets up there.

It was quite a deliberate attack and intervention in the election by Mr Ferguson.

If that were not enough, I have just read an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that went online at 7.36 p.m. tonight that another ex-Labor figure has decided to join the debate on the pro gas side. The article is entitled 'Daniel Andrews, Treasurer Tim Pallas refuse to rule out gas talks with Theo Theophanous', and it states:

Premier Daniel Andrews's former cabinet colleague Theo Theophanous is working as a 'political adviser' to an energy company that is a vocal advocate for Victoria to abolish its onshore gas moratorium, and the former energy minister remains in communication with the highest levels of the Victorian government.

Lakes Oil executive chairman Rob Annells confirmed that Mr Theophanous, who served as energy minister between

December 2002 and December 2006, had recently joined the company as a political adviser on energy.

Members will be gratified to know that Mr Theophanous is back and ready to exert his influence on Victorian politics yet again. In a cursory glance I could not locate him on the lobbyist register — which is not that easy to search, by the way.

The article goes on to state:

Mr Theophanous has spoken to both Mr Andrews and Treasurer Tim Pallas at separate events within the past fortnight, but Mr Theophanous declined to comment on his role or those talks when contacted on Tuesday.

It just has a familiarity about it. The article further states:

Mr Andrews and Mr Theophanous are believed to have spoken at the A-League grand final on Sunday, May 17, but the Premier's office declined to clarify whether the two men had discussed oil and gas or geothermal energy policy since Mr Andrews came to power ...

Mr Theophanous spoke to Mr Pallas one day later, on May 18, at a major gas conference in Melbourne, shortly after Mr Pallas had given a speech about Victoria's plans to hold an inquiry into onshore oil and gas.

Maybe I should just stop there and allow members to read the article for themselves if they are interested.

On behalf of major shareholder Gina Rinehart, Lakes Oil had previously had Alexander Downer on its board.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Mr Barber, at this point I have to pull you up, because whilst there is a good degree of latitude in this debate, I think you may be stretching it beyond breaking point. The subject material you are currently debating is not exactly related to the amendments or the motion before the chamber. I just wonder if you would be kind enough to return to the motion about referring this particular subject to a committee instead of debating the subject material itself.

Mr BARBER — I absolutely think we should have an inquiry into unconventional gas in Victoria, and along the way we may very well learn about a certain cast of characters if this motion of Mr Jennings is successful. These people may not necessarily turn up and give submissions to parliamentary inquiries, but nevertheless their influence is felt, and of course with a change of government in Victoria and Labor's position, the thesis I am putting forward is that Labor's position is very much up for grabs. Even the motion in front of us makes that very clear. As long as Labor's position is up for grabs, it is certainly better to have a lobbyist on

your side who speaks Labor than one who is as closely aligned with the Liberal Party as Mr Downer was.

That is why we ought to have the broadest possible terms of reference here, and it is very important to the Greens that we inquire into the environmental, public health, community, land and public safety benefits of a perpetual ban on onshore unconventional gas in Victoria and not merely have a discussion about how it might best be regulated. It is important that all factors and indeed the threshold issue of a permanent ban be brought into it.

I will briefly address the amendment moved by Mr Drum. I think the aim of Mr Drum's amendment is to ensure — if there is any grey area in the questions of conventional gas and unconventional gas, of what drilling is occurring onshore and offshore, inside Victoria's waters and in commonwealth waters, or whatever it might be — that the committee — —

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! If Mr Dalidakis would restrain himself from talking about tofu burgers and assorted other things, it would be much appreciated by me and by the house.

Mr BARBER — I think the aim is, if there is any particular grey area as to exactly what sort of exploration or development activity we are referring to, that this inquiry be in a position to sort all that out.

Labor may be of the view that there is no confusion about the line between conventional gas and unconventional gas and therefore may oppose Mr Drum's amendment, but when I moved a motion about unconventional gas in the previous Parliament the then Leader of the Opposition in the Council, Mr Lenders, lined up to explain to me that the term 'unconventional gas' is very unclear. I will quote briefly from *Hansard* to illustrate what Mr Lenders informed me. He said:

Mr Barber says three things in his motion which I am uncomfortable with. Firstly, his motion says 'unconventional gas'. In his introductory remarks he sought to define 'unconventional gas'. If you are doing an inquiry into unconventional gas, I accept that there will be grey areas, but the difference between conventional gas and unconventional gas has no science behind it.

If the Labor Party now argues there is a clear dividing line between conventional and unconventional gas and that neither this committee nor anybody who submits to it nor any other stakeholder in fossil fuel development in Victoria could possibly be confused by these terms, then we will all feel a bit more relaxed, but I am just

going back to the view the Labor Party previously put forward in this chamber, which was that there is potentially a grey area around unconventional gas, conventional gas, tight gas, shale gas, coal seam gas and all the other types of gas that are being looked for, talked about and explored at the moment.

On that particular question I will wait to see whether another speaker, perhaps one even more informed than the rest of us on these matters, can explain the difference between conventional and unconventional gas to everybody's satisfaction. Perhaps Mr Jennings in his reply will state his position, and then the Greens can decide how to vote on Mr Drum's amendment.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — It has been an edifying exercise to hear the comments of those from across the chamber and of Mr Barber to my right in relation to this motion, which refers the matter of unconventional gas to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning to inquire into and consider matters relating to the factors set out in the motion.

At the outset I indicate that I have direct involvement in this issue, having sought to understand it and to understand the intricacies of the issue as it applies to areas such as Gippsland. The issue of tight, shale and coal seam — that is, unconventional — gas, including but not limited to horizontal drills, has been the subject of enormous angst, consternation and distress amongst communities throughout Gippsland. In the majority they occupy rich and fertile land that has for an extensive period of time — for many generations as the prime asset for many families in the area — been the food bowl of Victoria.

Gippsland produces in excess of 23 per cent of the nation's beef and 26 per cent of its dairy. We have agricultural and horticultural products that are cutting edge. We have goods to market that are absolutely world class. We are developing boutique markets in the way we provide dairy, whether fresh or powdered, to domestic and international markets. We occupy prime real estate in the domestic economy so far as generating returns for the state and making sure that our communities are contributing to delivering a better product for the state and for the nation.

These issues all amount to a very significant risk. There is an awful lot at stake when contemplating the issue of unconventional gas and departing from the moratorium, which has been in place after Labor called for it three times and was eventually no longer ignored by the now opposition.

Labor made it clear that a proper scientific, evidentiary foundation was crucial to determine whether or not there would be any go-ahead when the stakes were so high. This is an issue from which we cannot come back if a decision is taken to allow licences, whether exploratory or for other purposes, to be granted or to otherwise go ahead. I have visited the wells and the sites. I am aware of the history and the science. It is unfortunate that in his contribution Mr Barber referred to the amendments and to Labor's position on the need for an inquiry as being something which was subject to some ambiguity or opacity, and he quoted Mr Lenders in relation to that issue.

I draw the attention of the house to comments made by the Legislative Assembly member for Melbourne, when she indicated concern with motion 110 as expressed on the notice paper. She indicated:

The inquiry only talks about how best to regulate coal seam gas, rather than asking whether Victoria should allow dangerous unconventional gas at all ...

We don't need unconventional gas. The risks to our community, to health, to agriculture, to water supply, and to our environment are all far too great.

We need a permanent ban on coal seam gas ... This option isn't even canvassed in Labor's inquiry terms of reference, which frame CSG in Victoria as a done deal, despite the huge risks. Labour is letting down rural and regional communities if they do not introduce a permanent ban on unconventional gas ...

That is a direct quote from the member for Melbourne in the Assembly, and unfortunately it establishes the fact that the Greens are not remotely concerned with the need to have an inquiry which uniformly puts on the table the evidence and takes communities through a transparent process, beyond the Reith gas market task force report, which was conducted in secret. It was a body which nobody actually knew existed, and the names of its members were unknown until a freedom of information request was issued.

Mr Jennings's motion makes sure that this issue is placed squarely before a committee to contemplate how it affects agriculture, land, aquifers, watertables and prospects for communities who are dependent upon the primary resource of land to make their living, who are tied to their communities through landownership, whose very core identity relates to this incredibly important issue. The Greens member for Melbourne has indicated that we should just go ahead and ban unconventional gas. She has in essence publicly indicated that there is no need for an inquiry at all, which to my mind is a very roughshod way of dealing with an extraordinarily complex issue. We need to make sure that the evidence is put on the table in a way

that makes it clear and acceptable to everyone as to where we go from here.

I do not propose to oppose the substance of the amendments before the house, but I indicate that the government stands by the motion as amended by the Greens but does not accept the amendment proposed by Mr Drum to substitute conventional and unconventional gas in the terms of the motion.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — In terms of rebuilding some harmony in the chamber, the government will be accepting the Greens amendments — —

Ms Shing — I said that.

Mr JENNINGS — Ms Shing did say that. The tone of her contribution may have indicated that a one-dimensional view needs to be more sophisticated, and that is the spirit in which I reinforce Ms Shing's contribution.

Mr Barber has laid down a challenge for me in relation to the position adopted by my then leader in this chamber, Mr Lenders, in relation to a discussion about these matters some years ago. This was some years before the Victorian parliamentary library provided a very useful piece of advice for the Victorian community clarifying what might be seen to be unconventional gas resources in Victoria. Specifically it referred to coal seam gas sources — tight sources and shale sources — and it was definitive in relation to that. That will be the defining line the Victorian government adopts and recognises, and that is the basis upon which we think the line should be drawn in relation to the terms of this committee reference. On that basis, while we are supporting the Greens amendments, we are not supporting Mr Drum's amendment.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! I would like to get an indication from members of the house if there is anyone or any group of members who are preparing to vote against the Greens amendments.

Mr Drum — We are.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Fair enough. There are currently three questions before the house, those being the amendments proposed by Mr Drum and Mr Barber in respect of the motion as well as the question of the substantive motion itself. The house will deal with the amendments to the motion first. As Mr Drum's proposed amendment will have an impact on changes to the substantive motion resulting from Mr Barber's amendments, should they succeed, I will put the questions first in respect of Mr Barber's

amendments and then proceed to Mr Drum's amendment. I will break Mr Barber's amendment up so what appears to be a singular amendment will be broken into nine separate questions. Five of them are substantive, so we will have votes on five of them.

House divided on Mr Barber's amendment 1:

Ayes, 19

Barber, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Dalidakis, Mr	Mulino, Mr
Dunn, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Pulford, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Purcell, Mr
Hartland, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Shing, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms
Jennings, Mr	Symes, Ms
Leane, Mr	Tierney, Ms
Melhem, Mr	

Noes, 19

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

Amendment negatived.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Can I have an indication, for the sake of the rest of the proceedings, whether or not Mr Drum intends to oppose the further amendments?

Mr Drum — The coalition will be voting against all the Greens amendments.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I thank Mr Drum for his advice. We proceed then to Mr Barber's amendment 2 to the environment and planning committee reference motion. I understand debate is concluded and there is no further debate in respect of that matter.

House divided on Mr Barber's amendment 2:

Ayes, 19

Barber, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Dalidakis, Mr	Mulino, Mr
Dunn, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Pulford, Ms
Elasmar, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Purcell, Mr
Hartland, Ms	Shing, Ms
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Jennings, Mr	Symes, Ms
Leane, Mr	Tierney, Ms
Melhem, Mr	

Noes, 19

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

Amendment negatived.

The PRESIDENT — Order! We move to amendment 5, which is a stand-alone amendment, and I will put that to the test.

House divided on Mr Barber's amendment 5:

Ayes, 19

Barber, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Mikakos, Ms
Dalidakis, Mr	Mulino, Mr
Dunn, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Eideh, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Pulford, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Purcell, Mr
Hartland, Ms	Shing, Ms
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms
Jennings, Mr	Symes, Ms
Leane, Mr	Tierney, Ms
Melhem, Mr	

Noes, 19

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

Amendment negatived.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take the opportunity to put to the house Mr Barber's amendment 6, which in my view also tests his amendment 7.

House divided on Mr Barber's amendment 6:

Ayes, 19

Barber, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Dalidakis, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Mulino, Mr
Dunn, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Pulford, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Purcell, Mr
Hartland, Ms	Shing, Ms
Herbert, Mr	Springle, Ms
Jennings, Mr	Symes, Ms
Leane, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Tierney, Ms
Melhem, Mr	

Noes, 19

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

Amendment negatived.

The PRESIDENT — Order! We now move to amendment 8, which also tests amendment 9.

Amendment negatived.**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.****Sitting extended pursuant to standing orders.****House divided on Mr Drum's amendment:***Ayes, 18*

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

Noes, 20

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

Amendment negatived.**Motion agreed to.**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Reference

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I move:

That pursuant to sessional order 6 this house requires the economy and infrastructure committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 31 March 2016, on the current legislative and administrative arrangements

(regulatory framework) for restricted breed dogs in Victoria, including the benefits and challenges of the regulatory framework and, in particular, the committee should —

- (1) review the current regulatory framework in Victoria, including the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (DAA), concerning restricted breed dogs and its effectiveness in achieving the purposes of the DAA, in particular —
 - (a) responsible dog ownership;
 - (b) protection of the environment; and
 - (c) protection of the community;
- (2) the review under (1) should —
 - (a) holistically consider the entire current regulatory framework in the management of dogs;
 - (b) include a review of —
 - (i) data on dog attacks, including attacks involving humans, attacks involving other animals, breeds of dogs involved in attacks, and the nature of the injuries sustained;
 - (ii) statistics on compliance with the regulatory framework;
 - (iii) the science and current methods used to identify restricted breed dogs; and
 - (iv) the responsible dog ownership program;
 - (c) take into account any limitations in the data;
- (3) review and compare the effectiveness of historical (regulation by deed) and current (regulation by breed) legislative frameworks in Victoria for the management of restricted breed dogs and promotion of community safety;
- (4) review and compare the effectiveness of other current regulatory frameworks in other Australian and overseas jurisdictions and where relevant, the costs and funding models required to support these frameworks;
- (5) take submissions from interested persons that have had interaction with the current and previous regulatory frameworks, including —
 - (a) local councils;
 - (b) veterinarians;
 - (c) dog breed experts;
 - (d) animal welfare organisations;
 - (e) Victorian schools and kindergartens, antenatal hospitals and maternal child health centres, that have access to the free government education program;
 - (f) victims of dog attacks;
 - (g) dog owners; and

- (h) the medical profession;
- (6) review outcomes of other relevant reviews, coronial investigations and inquests in relation to deaths from dog attacks in Victoria under both the previous and current regulatory regimes, in particular, the inquest into the death of four-year-old Ayen Chol;
- (7) review civil and criminal case law in Victoria in relation to the current and previous regulatory frameworks for restricted breed dogs;
- (8) make recommendations in relation to potential improvements or alternatives to the current regulatory framework for restricted breed dogs to better achieve the purpose and outcomes of the DAA, in particular, responsible dog ownership and protection of the environment and the community. These should include both responsive and preventive measures, such as improvements to controls and education programs;
- (9) any recommendations should have regard to the costs of implementation of any proposed changes to the public, government and businesses.

I will speak to this very briefly. This is the referral to the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure that was referred to in the debate in this place in the last sitting week on the Domestic Animals Act 1994 amendments.

The amendments we debated in the Parliament recently were to establish a moratorium that would take effect for a limited period of time, during which a parliamentary committee could inquire into the effectiveness of the legislative and administrative arrangements for specific breeds of dogs in Victoria. This motion is simply the second part of that endeavour. The legislation has now passed, and I thank all members for their support for the passage of that very narrow piece of legislation.

That legislation is without purpose without this committee referral. This motion simply seeks to establish the committee inquiry. The substantive questions were aired reasonably comprehensively in the second-reading debate when the legislation was debated, so I will not canvass those issues again. I would urge all members to support this motion and its speedy passage so that that review can get underway sooner rather than later.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Elyptol

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and it is regarding access for a Bendigo-based company, Elyptol, to have its Victorian-made hand sanitiser included on the hospital purchasing list through Health Purchasing Victoria (HPV). Elyptol is a Bendigo-based company that has developed a natural hand sanitiser that has been certified by the Therapeutic Goods Administration for the healthcare market.

Currently Elyptol's product is on the New South Wales healthcare tender contract list. However, it is finding it difficult to access procurement lists in Victoria. New South Wales Ambulance promoted Elyptol onto the New South Wales healthcare tender list in 2012 after it conducted an extensive evaluation that found the product to be beneficial to those with hand sensitivities. Elyptol is an Australian-based company that is locally owned and located in regional Victoria, in fact in the city of Bendigo. Its product is manufactured in Victoria, and yet it cannot access the hospital market in Victoria because it is shut out of the purchasing process.

The company is frustrated by the lack of response in dealing with relevant healthcare agencies such as the Health Innovation and Reform Council. The company wrote to the health minister in April, and it has not yet received a response or even an acknowledgement that its correspondence has been received. It has also written to the chair of HPV, Dr Pintado, expressing its concerns and copied that letter to the health minister. In addition, Elyptol has written to the members for Bendigo East and Bendigo West in the Assembly, but it has not yet had a response from those local members.

My request of the minister is that she work with the Bendigo-based company Elyptol to establish if access to Victorian hospitals for its hand sanitiser product can be provided through Health Purchasing Victoria.

East Beach, Port Fairy

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — The matter I raise tonight is for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. My home town of Port Fairy is a picturesque area and prime tourism destination, recognised throughout the world for its fantastic attributes. In 2012 it was voted the world's

most livable community of towns with a population under 20 000 by the UN-recognised LivCom Awards. It has regularly been awarded in the category and acknowledged as one of Australia's top five tourist destinations.

The beautiful East Beach is a crucial part of Port Fairy's appeal. It is now under threat, with erosion revealing an old tip and rubbish spillage from the sand dunes. The Moyne Shire Council has undertaken a temporary fix by erecting a 280-metre rock wall to stop the rubbish spreading further, but large swells and daily erosion mean this short-term solution is not effective. The latest discussions have revealed that removing the tip site and waste will cost about \$30 million — obviously an impossible figure for a small rural council.

While acknowledging that the council needs to take control and actively work to rectify the issue, it is apparent that this is a critical and massive situation that will need help from all levels of government. If this situation is not resolved, the future of Port Fairy as a tourism destination, its economic security and the happiness of residents are hugely under threat. This situation needs to be resolved as soon as possible, and state government support is needed for this to happen.

I urge the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water to meet with the Moyne Shire Council and provide assistance to resolve this situation satisfactorily and as soon as possible.

Ballarat sports and events centre

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development, and it relates to the proposed Ballarat sports and events centre. The centre is a critically needed investment into indoor courts for netball, basketball and volleyball, amongst others. Much of the work has already been done for the planning phase of this project by Ballarat Basketball, which on behalf of the Ballarat Indoor Sports Group has funded \$150 000 for planning and design work and provided \$20 000 worth of other in-kind work. I congratulate Ballarat Basketball president Nick Grylewicz and CEO Peter Eddy for their commitment to this project. Indeed the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Matthew Guy, and I met with Mr Eddy last week to discuss the importance of this project.

I note that there are three priorities to be addressed by this project: extra courts for local community use for indoor sports; training court facilities for the Ballarat Sovereigns, Ballarat Rush and Ballarat Miners; and a show court for events requiring stadium-type seating.

With the funding being provided by the Labor government, we will have a half-done project which will not deliver what Ballarat deserves. Ballarat deserves a fully funded project with six additional courts, including a show court with stadium seating for 2000 to 3000 people. This project is about not just delivering sporting infrastructure for Ballarat but also having the opportunity to capitalise on economic opportunities. The current annual economic benefit returned to the City of Ballarat from Ballarat Basketball events alone is \$4.7 million. The sky is the limit in terms of the potential economic returns of this project if fully funded. However, this is a \$21 million project. Ballarat City Council has committed \$5 million and the coalition committed \$15 million prior to the election; however, Labor has only committed \$9 million, just enough to complete half of the project.

I call upon the Minister for Regional Development to properly fund this critical project for Ballarat and deliver not only the sporting opportunities but also the economic opportunities this project will bring to Ballarat.

Port of Geelong

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Ports, and it is in relation to the future sustainability of the port of Geelong. Geelong is Victoria's largest regional port and one of the largest multi-cargo facilities in the country. Over 12 million tonnes of cargo a year are handled at the port. It is responsible for roughly 5000 jobs in the region. Importantly for a region that has faced several large industry closures, and with the closure of the Ford plant looming, the port of Geelong has significantly increased its gross tonnage and total visits are up by 200 ships a year in the last decade to over 660 a year. This trade is worth billions of dollars. It is primarily in gas and petroleum, with grain, woodchips and fertiliser also being important trade commodities. Geelong handles about 25 per cent of Victoria's bulk cargoes. This is a success story for a regional port which plays a vital role in the economic health of my electorate.

However, as always, the world continues to change, and it is important that Geelong maintains its place at the forefront of regional shipping. In light of the government's intention to lease the port of Melbourne, I ask the minister to detail how the interests of the Geelong community will be accommodated in the process and how the future sustainability of the port of Geelong will be maintained and grown.

Government tendering system

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, the Honourable Tim Pallas, and it concerns the matter of government tendering processes and the Victorian building industry.

As the Treasurer would know, in December 2014 the Senate referred to the economics committee an inquiry into insolvency in the Australian construction industry. This was in response to the impact that phoenix companies have had on the loss of money and jobs by contractors, suppliers and employees in the building industry. This reference is something that we applaud.

It would come as no surprise to the Treasurer — and we share areas in Western Metropolitan Region — that many representatives of Victorian construction businesses have been suffering badly as a result of being unable to compete under the current government tendering system. Many of them have come to see me in my office, and I am sure that they have been knocking on the Treasurer's door as well. They have been advising me that many well-known companies that have been around for generations have been driven to the wall. There has been a huge economic and social cost. The imminent closure, or in fact the closure, of many of these businesses has come for two reasons: firstly, the activities of unscrupulous operators who have no respect for the entitlements of Victorian workers, and this is a matter of corporate responsibility; and secondly, the use of out-of-date tendering systems which allow companies to game the tendering processes, and this is an area of government responsibility.

Value for money should mean, and used to mean, the price that will benefit the taxpayers of Victoria. This enables businesses to compete on a level playing field, to make adequate profit, to employ locals and apprentices on a long-term basis and to pay their workers the correct entitlements. However, it seems that value for money has deteriorated to mean 'whoever tenders with the lowest price'. This is exactly the opposite of competing on a level playing field, making profits, employing apprentices and paying correct entitlements.

Victoria has a great opportunity for leading in this state in the area of jobs, families and communities. Local companies should be enabled to compete and to thrive, not just survive. I ask the Treasurer to examine the current tendering system and determine whether it can be enhanced to ensure that Victoria's construction

companies and contractors are given a fair chance at winning a contract on a level playing field.

Ice rehabilitation facilities

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Mental Health, Martin Foley, and it relates both to the recommendations that came out of the joint parliamentary committee investigation into the supply and use of methamphetamines in Victoria in the last Parliament and more currently to the work that the *Geelong Advertiser* has been doing in its 'Breaking ice' feature stories. The newspaper has been calling for more rehabilitation beds to be made available in Geelong and also raising the issue of mandatory rehabilitation for those addicted to the drug ice.

I particularly want to focus on rehabilitation facilities and beds for the Geelong region. We are at a crisis point in relation to treating those who are addicted to the use of crystal methamphetamines. Detoxification and rehabilitation take a significantly longer time for those addicted to ice than is required to treat addiction to traditional drugs, whether they be speed, the powdered form of methamphetamine, or heroin, which take two to three months of rehabilitation; ice takes about nine months and requires significant rehabilitation facilities.

As has been outlined in the recommendations sitting before the government for nearly nine months now, the issue is the need for a greater investment in regional Victoria in rehabilitation beds for addicted users of the drug ice.

I support the *Geelong Advertiser* in its endeavour to get a response from government in relation to providing extra infrastructure in Geelong to provide that rehabilitation for drug users who are addicted to ice, but not only in Geelong. In Bacchus Marsh the Bluebird House has indicated it is looking for funding to be able to accommodate those drug addicts in their community who are addicted to ice. It is a recommendation of the joint parliamentary committee — one of 54, which the government is yet to respond to. I also refer to the use of drug courts in regional areas, where a system is put in place whereby those offenders can rehabilitate themselves and not go through the prison system.

My matter is a serious one. To its credit, the *Geelong Advertiser* has raised this as a significant issue in the Geelong community, where there is high youth unemployment. It desperately needs more rehabilitation beds. I call for the minister to talk to the agencies involved in the Geelong community and the greater

western Victoria region to discuss the needs of the community for rehabilitation beds for those addicts.

Care With Me

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Families and Children. On 20 August 2014 the Labor member for Thomastown in the Assembly, Ms Halfpenny, asked the then Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, to provide funding for the organisation Care With Me Inc. to meet the recommendations of the *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*. At the time the member quoted the findings of an out-of-home care scoping study conducted by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, stating:

At least 13 per cent of children in out-of-home care are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, yet there are no programs or supports to recognise their cultural and religious differences or to assist foster carers to become aware of those cultural and religious needs and the importance of identity.

Recommendation 68 of the inquiry report states:

The Department of Human Services should improve the cultural competence of integrated family services and statutory child protection services, including through:

...

requiring cultural competence to be a component of all training;

providing culturally appropriate training, assistance and support to carers of children and young people ...

Care With Me is an extremely small volunteer-run not-for-profit organisation which has been providing valuable services to the child and family welfare sector for five years without any government funding. In particular, Care With Me is, as far as I am aware, the only organisation providing these services to the Islamic community. When it began there were fewer than five Muslim families registered to provide out-of-home care, whereas there were two Muslim children and young people going into out-of-home care every week in Victoria.

Prior to entering Parliament I was engaged by the organisation as an independent contractor to conduct a small piece of research. During this time I learnt that the organisation was essentially funded by a range of multicultural communities, with work being conducted almost exclusively by volunteers. However, the time has come when it appears this situation is no longer tenable. The recent budget failed to allocate any funding to Care With Me, or indeed to any service

aimed at improving cultural competence among out-of-home care programs and intensive family support services, despite the support from some Labor members. I consider this extremely unfortunate, as small organisations cannot be run on goodwill alone forever, and Victoria may soon lose this excellent service.

I therefore ask the Minister for Families and Children to meet with the board of Care With Me and with foster carers who have benefited from their services so that she can hear firsthand why the future of this service is important to Victoria.

Colac police station

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter this evening for the attention of the Minister for Police. It relates to the state of the Colac police station. Prior to the last election the then Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Wells, who is now the member for Rowville in the Assembly, and the then Minister for Public Transport and member for Polwarth in the Assembly, Terry Mulder, made a commitment to the people of Colac that if re-elected the coalition would rebuild the Colac police station. The Colac police station is outdated and in need of replacing.

The Police Association has said that Colac's ageing police station is among the worst in the state. The secretary of the Police Association, Ron Iddles, was quoted in the *Colac Herald* as having said:

The previous government had committed to rebuild Colac police station before the last election; it was number one on the buildings' works maintenance list.

He went on to say:

It's an old station, it's small, overcrowded to some extent, it's out of date and there are issues around security and we totally support Terry Mulder's call for a new station.

Prior to the government handing down its first budget I visited the Colac police station with Mr Mulder and met with the hardworking members of Victoria Police stationed there. There was hope that the government would match the commitment made by the coalition and fund a new station for Colac. Regrettably there is no money for a new station, and as a result of the changed operating environment I understand that at times the Colac station is now operating 16 hours a day, not 24 hours a day. This reinforces the need for a new, modern station to be built for the people of Colac.

The action I seek from the minister is, given that his government has failed to provide the capital required to rebuild the station in this budget, that he outline what

action he will take to undertake preliminary design works and to engage with the local community so that a clear pathway forward that will see the delivery of a new police station for the Colac community is understood.

Werribee Mercy Hospital

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, the Honourable Jill Hennessy. Last sitting week's budget announcement was a very proud day for the Andrews Labor government. Unlike the previous government, we made it our commitment to make access to health and education our top priority, because every child and every Victorian should have access to the education and health care they so rightfully deserve.

I was personally pleased, after speaking with the CEO of Werribee Mercy Hospital, that the government committed to invest \$85 million to expand Werribee Mercy Hospital. In addition to this, \$15 million has been committed to the Mercy hospital mental health expansion to help those in the west suffering mental illness. This expansion is something the hospital had been hoping for for quite some time, but its pleas had fallen on deaf ears until now.

The commitment by the Labor government will provide families in Melbourne's west with access to surgical and critical care services closer to home. We are all aware that the hospital has confronted significant capacity concerns in recent years, as it is located in one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. This redevelopment of the current hospital will ensure that it can meet the continuing demands on its services. Currently the hospital offers 260 beds, including 37 across Mercy mental health, and in 2014 Werribee Mercy Hospital recorded 33 571 attendances at its emergency department and a staggering 3014 births. This figure will continue to grow in the future.

Too often people living within this growth corridor are being turned away due to the demand placed on the hospital's services and are being forced to travel to Sunshine or Footscray hospitals to access care. These two hospitals are also struggling to keep up with the growing demand in their local areas. This is why the Andrews Labor government is providing an additional \$2.1 billion to the health system, of which \$970 million has been allocated for hospitals to meet increases in demand. Also, the government is investing \$560 million to build new hospitals, expand and redevelop health and ambulance facilities, and purchase and upgrade vital equipment.

The expansion of Werribee Mercy Hospital will deliver 64 additional inpatient beds, an 8-bed high dependency unit and 6 new operating theatres. With funding being committed to the expansion and redevelopment of Werribee Mercy Hospital to ensure that health care is available to people in the west, I ask the minister when construction will begin on this new development and when that development will be open to make accessing health care at Werribee Mercy Hospital easier.

Avondale Heights development

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the old TAFE site in Military Road, Avondale Heights. This has been an ongoing issue for some years. My involvement goes back prior to the 2010 election when local residents came to me deeply concerned about the development that had been promoted by their local member at the time, Rob Hulls, the former member for Niddrie in the Assembly. This particular development, or I should say overdevelopment, was quite extraordinary. It was a bit like Tiananmen Square at lunchtime — there would have been people in this particular development in numbers that under normal circumstances we would not consider.

As a result of hearing what the good people of Avondale Heights had to say, I agreed that this was an overdevelopment and spoke to Matthew Guy, the new member for Bulleen in the Assembly, who was then shadow planning minister and who subsequently became the Minister for Planning. I put into action our concerns about this particular site.

I have to inform the house that tonight the Moonee Valley City Council has approved an Australand development application despite the residents screaming blue murder that they have not been consulted. It seems to me that the residents of Moonee Valley have been done in by the council on this particular matter. Councillors have been saying that they had a consultation session in February. The residents tell me quite the opposite. It was not a consultation session. It was very much one way and very much an opportunity for council to sell this development to the residents. In effect the residents have had no opportunity to express their concerns in a consultation process because no consultation process actually existed.

I believe this to be wrong. I believe this to be grossly unfair. I believe this to be a gross abuse of the powers of local government in the planning area, and I ask the current minister to intervene in this planning application

and put a stop to this until proper processes have been followed. I believe transparency and honesty are important in any planning process. It would appear that that is not the case on this occasion, and I ask the minister to put a stop to this application until such time as proper processes can be followed and the people of Moonee Valley can be heard.

Responses

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — There were a number of adjournment matters this evening.

Ms Lovell raised a matter for the Minister for Health.

Mr Purcell raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water.

Mr Morris raised a matter for the Minister for Regional Development.

Ms Tierney raised a matter for the Minister for Ports.

Dr Carling-Jenkins raised a matter for the Treasurer.

Mr Ramsay raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health.

Mr O'Donohue raised a matter for the Minister for Police.

Mr Eideh raised a matter for the Minister for Health.

Mr Finn raised a matter for the Minister for Planning.

I will refer all those matters to the appropriate ministers for response.

Further, Ms Springle raised a matter for me, which I propose to respond to now and therefore discharge this matter. Ms Springle referred to a local organisation called Care With Me, and I am familiar with the work of this particular organisation. If I recall correctly, I met with this organisation last year, and I am familiar with Ms Halfpenny also having had discussions with this organisation. I am not aware of a meeting request the organisation has made to me in my capacity as the Minister for Families and Children, but I am always happy to have meetings and discussions with relevant stakeholders. In fact I have made it a point of distinction with the previous minister in that stakeholders have frequently said how accessible I have been and how willing I have been to meet with them and have discussions. I am certainly happy for the organisation to contact me directly for a meeting.

I make the broad point to Ms Springle in relation to the matter she raised that it is correct that the Cummins inquiry had some specific recommendations in relation to children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and it was a matter of disappointment to me that the previous government did not move to take any action in respect of these particular recommendations.

I am aware that the Commission for Children and Young People has established a reference group in relation to issues specifically relating to children and young people from CALD backgrounds. As part of that reference group the commission holds consultations and regular discussions with organisations, including amongst others the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. I have indicated to the commission and to the reference group that I am happy to take onboard feedback around the particular needs of children and young people from CALD backgrounds as it relates to children in our out-of-home care system.

I have asked my department to do some further work on these matters because no strategy was developed by the previous government. I make the point that there is significant investment in this year's budget in our child protection and out-of-home care system. In fact it represents a 17 per cent increase compared to last year's budget. There is also a significant boost in funding not only in relation to the out-of-home care system broadly but also in relation to the additional funding, with \$31.3 million over four years for carer payments.

I have previously indicated to the house that my department is currently working on a foster care recruitment and retention strategy. As part of that strategy, I am very keen to see the diversity of our carers addressed. It is important that we have foster carers from Islamic and other communities to reflect the broader composition of the community. We have children from different backgrounds going into out-of-home care, and it is therefore important that we have foster carers who also represent the different cultural and faith groups within our community. This is an issue that I am very much alive to, and there will be further work done in relation to the development of this particular foster carer recruitment strategy with a view to increasing our diversity.

I certainly encourage members to raise these issues as they have discussions with different cultural groups. There are great opportunities and great personal rewards for foster carers who provide that much-needed support to vulnerable children in our community. In my experience, when I have raised this issue with different

community groups, they have not been aware that members of their community could go through an accreditation and screening process and actually become foster carers. We certainly have a lot of work to do to raise awareness in the community about those particular opportunities.

The member did not refer to a particular budget line item in relation to funding for Care With Me. I make the point that that is not how budgets work. Budget funding relates to particular programs and initiatives. No specific organisation is mentioned in my portfolio outputs. There may well be opportunities for different organisations to put in a proposal or an expression of interest to my department or to tender through the different funding initiatives in order to access the additional funding that we have outlaid in this year's state budget.

I look forward to hearing from the organisation directly. I will keep the member and the house informed about the different work we will be doing for children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in relation to our out-of-home care system and our child protection system more broadly.

I have written responses to adjournment debate matters raised by Ms Lovell on 18 March; Dr Carling-Jenkins, Ms Crozier and Mr Mulino on 14 April; Mr Davis, Ms Dunn, Mr Finn, Ms Lovell, Mr Ramsay, Ms Springle and Ms Wooldridge on 15 April; Mr O'Donohue on 16 April; Mr Finn and Ms Tierney on 5 May; and Mr Mulino on 7 May.

The PRESIDENT — Order! On that basis, the house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 11.00 p.m.

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied to Hansard.

Public holidays

Question asked by: Mr Ondarchie
Directed to: Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade
Asked on: 5 May 2015

RESPONSE:

The recurrent budgets for Victorian Government departments and agencies are set based on the estimated cost of delivering individual outputs to those organisations. Because the Government's funding is driven by a set level of service delivery, it is always necessary to make adjustments to accommodate changes in input costs over the course of the financial year.

The majority of these adjustments are made as part of the annual budget process, and take into account all material cost pressures that affect the delivery of outputs, including the price of materials, population growth, inflation and wages. Changes to input costs arising from the Gazettal of Easter Sunday as a public holiday are incorporated into these figures.

As part of the 2015-16 budget process, aggregated adjustments to output costs were made and are reflected in the revised output costs for 2014-15 and over the forward estimates.

Abbotsford Convent

Question asked by: Ms Patten
Directed to: Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade
Asked on: 5 May 2015

RESPONSE:

Revenue from the Congestion Levy in 2015-16 is estimated to be \$120.2 million per the budget.

The Congestion Levy is used to price congestion and used to improve alternative transport options. As stated on the Abbotsford Convents website, these transport alternatives near the Convent include:

- The Victoria Park Train Station,
- The 200 and 207 Bus lines,
- The 12, 48 and 109 Tram routes, and
- The Capital City cycling and walking path that passes through the site.

The Abbotsford Convent website advocates using these alternative modes of transport too, stating:

‘avoid the ever-increasing traffic on the roads, it’s (bike and public transport) the most sustainable way to get around and, to be honest, street parking is limited and on busy days the car park fills quickly’

The Andrews Labor Government recognises the important place the Abbotsford Convent has in the community, and is proud to acknowledge that the previous Labor Government gifted the site to the public, in addition to the land to provide car parking. Further, \$4 million was provided by the previous Labor Government for restoration works, in addition to revenue generated by the car park.

Renewable energy

Question asked by: Mr Purcell
Directed to: Minister for Agriculture
Asked on: 6 May 2015

RESPONSE:

Renewable energy creates jobs, drives growth and helps us maintain our lifestyle and protect our environment.

The Andrews Government wants investors to come to Victoria and back renewable energy, including in Western Victoria.

The Victorian Government has publically expressed disappointment that the Federal Government plans to cut the Renewable Energy Target (RET) back to 33,000 gigawatt hours by 2020. Such a cut to the RET puts investment and job creation opportunities that are already before us, at risk.

The Government has called on the Commonwealth to change the renewable energy laws so Victoria can have its own top-up scheme. Removal of Section 7c of the Renewable Energy Act (Cth) would allow Victoria more policy options in supporting renewable energy development.

If that section is removed, the Victorian Government will reinstate the Victorian Renewable Energy Target (VRET) to top-up the national scheme.

In addition to support for a VRET, the Premier, the Hon Daniel Andrews MP, recently announced changes to wind farm planning laws. The changes reduce the household veto for a proposed wind turbine development from two kilometres to one kilometre from a dwelling.

These measures will help support businesses such as Keppel Prince in Portland.

The Andrews Labor Government made a commitment to reform wind farm planning laws and open Victoria to renewable energy. These plans strike the right balance between protecting property and supporting jobs in emerging industries.

The Government has also announced the development of a Victorian Renewable Energy Action Plan, which will outline a comprehensive set of measures to attract Victoria's share of the \$36 billion of investment in renewable energy forecast to occur in Australia by 2020.

The Government's \$200 million Future Industries Fund and \$20 million New Energy Jobs Fund will also offer support to businesses and community groups developing renewable energy projects in Western Victoria.

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

Question asked by: Mr O'Donohue
Directed to: Special Minister of State
Asked on: 7 May 2015

RESPONSE:

The Government has provided \$150 million to attack problem gambling-\$148 million (over 4 years) to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (the VRGF), and \$2 million (over 2 years) to the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing.

The Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing will complement the work of the VGRF and support the introduction of pre-commitment technology by implementing an information package to minimise the harm of gambling and protect consumers from the problems associated with gambling.

Multicultural affairs grants

Question asked by: Mrs Peulich
Directed to: Special Minister of State
Asked on: 7 May 2015

RESPONSE:

In May 2014, the Victorian Auditor-Generals Office (VAGO) released its report on *Service Access for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers*.

The report identified a need for greater clarity, efficiency and coordination in relation to the roles and responsibilities of the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship.

The Government is currently considering the recommendations of the VAGO report. Improving the administration of all programs within the Multicultural Affairs portfolio is part of the Government's considerations.

The Victorian Multicultural Commission will still have a significant role in determining approvals for grants. The Commission will not be sidelined in making determinations on grants.

Firearms

Question asked by: Mr Young
Directed to: Minister for Training and Skills
Asked on: 7 May 2015

RESPONSE:

The Firearms Regulations 2008 prescribes the fee for a Permit to Acquire for handguns and longarms in Victoria.

I am advised by Victoria Police that as at 31 March 2015, the number of handgun licence holders was 5,467 and the number of Category A, B, C, D and E longarm licence holders totalled 198,772.

The significant difference in the number of handgun and longarm licensees is best explained by the reasons for which these firearms are used. In the absence of being employed as a prison or security guard or carrying on a private security business providing armed guard or cash-in-transit activities, individuals can only be licensed to possess, carry and use a handgun for the purposes of target shooting at an approved shooting range.

Unlike handguns, individuals can be licensed to possess, carry and use longarms for the following reasons which include

- sport or target shooting
- hunting
- professional hunting, that is where a person relies on hunting as their primary source of income;
- clay target shooting
- occupation as a prison or security guard

Given the significant difference in the number of handgun and longarm licensees and the fact that handguns are required for a very limited number of activities, it was determined that fees for a Permit to Acquire a handgun and a longarm were set at different rates. Fees are set on a cost-recovery basis and any minor reduction in handgun-related fees would result in an increase in longarm fees, affecting a larger number of people.

Following the shootings at Monash University in 2002, involving a concealable handgun, and the consequent 2002 National Handgun Control Agreement designed to further restrict the availability and use of handguns, the Government is mindful of the risks and dangers that handguns can present in the community.

The relative fee levels under the Firearms Regulations is also a function of historical practice in the setting of firearms fees in Victoria. There is cross subsidisation between fee levels, as between longarm and handgun fees, as well as between licensees and dealer fees.

The fees will again be subject to review prior to the remaking of the Firearms Regulations in 2018.

