

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 11 November 2015

(Extract from book 16)

Internet: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/downloadhansard

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AM

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

The ministry

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

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 — Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr Morris, Mr Ondarchie and Ms Tierney.

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning — Ms Bath, #Mr Bourman, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Davis, Ms Dunn, #Ms Hartland, Mr Leane, #Mr Purcell, #Mr Ramsay, Ms Shing, Mr Somyurek and Mr Young.

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

participating members

Legislative Council select committees

Port of Melbourne Select Committee — Mr Barber, Mr Drum, Mr Mulino, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Purcell, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing and Ms Tierney.

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 Bourman, Mr Elasmarr and Mr Melhem. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Nardella and Ms Ryall.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Council*): Ms Patten and Mr Somyurek. (*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 — 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 Elasmr, Mr Finn, Mr Morris, Ms Patten, Mr Ramsay

Leader of the Government:
The Hon. G. JENNINGS

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

Leader of the Opposition:
The Hon. M. WOOLDRIDGE

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

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

Leader of the Greens:
Mr G. BARBER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Barber, Mr Gregory John	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Morris, Mr Joshua	Western Victoria	LP
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
Drum, Mr Damian Kevin	Northern Victoria	Nats	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
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
Elasmr, 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

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2015

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

<i>East–west link</i>	4227, 4228
<i>Regional development</i>	4228, 4229
<i>Government-subsidised training</i>	4229
<i>Cage fighting</i>	4230, 4231
<i>Disability services</i>	4231, 4232
<i>Victorian Health Promotion Foundation board</i>	4233
<i>Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation board</i>	4233, 4234
<i>Legislative Assembly by-elections</i>	4234, 4235
<i>Written responses</i>	4235

<i>Cage fighting</i>	4276
----------------------------	------

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

<i>Answers</i>	4235
----------------------	------

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

<i>Northern Metropolitan Region</i>	4236
<i>Northern Victoria Region</i>	4236
<i>Western Victoria Region</i>	4237
<i>Southern Metropolitan Region</i>	4237
<i>South Eastern Metropolitan Region</i>	4237

PETITIONS

<i>Route 8 tram</i>	4237
<i>Grand Final Friday</i>	4238
<i>Melbourne Metro rail project</i>	4238
<i>Adoption legislation</i>	4238

PAPERS

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

<i>Remembrance Day</i>	4239
<i>Diwali festival</i>	4239
<i>Victorian Multicultural Commission</i>	4240
<i>Cage fighting</i>	4240
<i>Mirboo North Secondary College</i>	4240

POLICE NUMBERS

LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

<i>Reference</i>	4251
------------------------	------

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

<i>Regional Development Victoria: report 2014–15</i>	4268
<i>Auditor-General: Department of Education and Training — Strategic Planning</i>	4269
<i>Goulburn-Murray Water: report 2014–15</i>	4269

ADJOURNMENT

<i>School asbestos removal</i>	4270
<i>Nadrasca</i>	4271
<i>Renewable energy</i>	4271
<i>Deer Park level crossing</i>	4271
<i>National assessment program — literacy and numeracy</i>	4272
<i>Geelong–Melbourne rail service</i>	4272
<i>Western Victoria Region disability services</i>	4273
<i>Heavy vehicle regulation</i>	4273
<i>City of Brimbank</i>	4274
<i>Youth justice facilities</i>	4274
<i>Responses</i>	4274

Wednesday, 11 November 2015

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 2.04 p.m. and read the prayer.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I acknowledge that it is Ms Fitzherbert's birthday today.

An honourable member — Happy birthday to — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I do not wish to spoil her day!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

East–west link

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. On 15 April the Premier told Victorians that he had 'capped the state's liability on scrapping the east–west link'. Yesterday, however, the Department of Treasury and Finance annual report showed that the cost of scrapping the east–west link has actually blown out by hundreds of millions of dollars. So I ask: why did the government claim to have capped the cost of scrapping the east–west link when quite clearly that was not the case?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I am pretty certain that Mr Rich-Phillips knows the answer to this question because the item that has actually been referred to in the last 24 hours, which is the cost of the swaps associated with the debt facility, was in fact a pre-existing mechanism that predated the arrival of the government. Its determination and its repurposing and the maintenance of that debt facility is something that the government took responsibility for when it moved away from the east–west tunnel proposal and decided to deliver on its election commitments and introduce an infrastructure program that in fact reflects what it believes is not only its mandate but is in the best interests of the people of Victoria in terms of the effective delivery of infrastructure now and into the future.

Indeed within those arrangements the matter of the debt procurement and swap arrangement related to the facilitation of infrastructure in Victoria is basically the same today as it was when the government came to office and on 15 April when the outcome was secured of terminating the east–west contract, and the — —

Mr Finn — Who writes this stuff for you?

Mr JENNINGS — No-one needs to write it.

Mr Finn — This is straight out of *Yes Minister*.

Mr JENNINGS — No. This happens to be the truth, happens to be accurate, happens to be apposite, actually has to cover the basis of the issues that are at hand. What was announced by the Premier earlier this year were the circumstances by which the contract was terminated. In fact as part of that conversation the government of the day indicated that there was going to be a repurposing of a pre-existing debt facility. The costs that have been disclosed in the last 24 hours and that are at the heart of the member's question existed at that date, and they still exist today.

Supplementary question

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. The minister has made it quite clear that the liability for those debt swap cost increases is as a direct consequence of this government's decision to cancel the east–west link — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is a direct consequence of this government's decision to cancel the east–west link. We have seen this government try to hide the deficit, as shown by the Auditor-General. We have seen a blow-out of more than \$1 billion in state debt, and we have now seen this increase in the cost of the liabilities on these debt swaps as a consequence of the government's decision to cancel the east–west link. So I ask: will the government provide an assurance that there will be no further increase in the liabilities associated with this government's decision to cancel the east–west link?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Within the scope of what Mr Rich-Phillips has said there are a number of elements of the preamble to his question that need to be very clearly in the mind of the Victorian community both now and into the future. In relation to the reporting of the deficit within the budget, at no stage has the Victorian budget gone into deficit; at no stage has the \$1.5 billion left the financial arrangements of the state of Victoria.

As part of the agreement that Mr Rich-Phillips's government entered into with the federal government — as part of that agreement of the allocation of the \$1.5 billion — at no stage did it indicate that the commonwealth government had the opportunity to take away that \$1.5 billion in one budget year if that project was terminated. At no stage is that premise correct — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister to continue without assistance.

Mr JENNINGS — President, I would appreciate it if you would give me another minute, but that first minute is up. It is up to you, President, whether you want me to continue.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I wish the minister to continue.

Mr JENNINGS — Thank you, President. The terms of the agreement between the previous government — the coalition government — in Victoria and the commonwealth government about the \$1.5 billion were very clear. If the contract were cancelled — if the east–west contracts were actually terminated — the commonwealth was obliged under the terms of that agreement to consider its options, which included withdrawing payments in future years from the state budget.

At no stage did the commonwealth have the right to take away \$1.5 billion from the state of Victoria. Not only did it not have the right to but it did not. In fact the Leader of the Opposition in the other place made it crystal clear as far back as December that once the \$1.5 billion had been allocated to Victoria, it was for Victorian purposes and it should not go back to the commonwealth. He said it should stay in the budget, and in fact it has stayed in the budget. Regardless of the accounting treatment that has been reported on in the last 24 hours, at no stage has that \$1.5 billion left this budget.

Ordered that answers be considered next day on motion of Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria).

East–west link

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is also to the Leader of the Government. I refer to the annual report of the Treasury Corporation of Victoria tabled yesterday that shows the state has incurred interest charges of over \$200 million in relation to the east–west link settlement, and I ask: when did the minister first become aware of this significant increase in interest charges?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Ms Fitzherbert, on her birthday, may have asked me a question that is not true in terms of its factual basis and indeed is not in accordance with the answer that I have already given in this chamber. The debt facility and the swap facility that is in place predated the arrival of the

Andrews government. The swap arrangement had already been part of the financial arrangements that were incurred as part of the preparation by the previous government for the financing ability of the east–west contracts, so in fact it predated the arrival of the Andrews government. The Andrews government chose to repurpose that debt facility, to repurpose the swap, for further infrastructure needs of Victoria, so indeed there has been no additional cost borne by this government on the basis of the change to the purpose for which that debt facility would be used.

Supplementary question

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — Is the minister aware of what other costs in addition to interest are payable as part of the line of credit and when the line of credit ends?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — From memory, President, the debt facility was actually applied for a time frame of over 25 years. That is what my best recollection of it may be. As I have indicated, the incoming Andrews government inherited the swap arrangement from the previous government. In fact it was there to cover what it had intended to use that for — the purpose of the east–west contract. This government, on the basis of the support from the electorate to actually change the profile of our investment strategy into the future and to repurpose that debt facility, assumed that debt facility, and this swap arrangement is part of the preconditions of that 25-year-long drawdown of that debt facility and is still available to the people of Victoria, as it was prior to the last election. It was when we came to government, it was subsequent to the east–west decision and it still exists to this day.

Regional development

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Regional Development, and I refer the minister to comments made at a doorstep on the steps of Parliament House on 1 July where she informed the media that she had just received a copy of John Brumby’s regional review but she would not be releasing it publicly until October. The minister has clearly missed her own deadline. Why has the minister kept Mr Brumby’s review from the people of regional Victoria for nearly five months?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank Mr Drum for his question, because of course Mr Drum was there. John Brumby and I were standing on the steps of Parliament and

Mr Drum wandered past, and we had a lovely chat and indicated what we were doing there on that occasion.

I know Mr Drum will be very interested to see what will be the next evolution in Labor's very, very strong record of regional economic development policy in this state. We are working very hard to get Victoria back on track. The review that was undertaken by a number of people, chaired by John Brumby, and with the input of some 600 or 700 people across regional Victoria has provided some exceptional suggestions to government. And I would just indicate to Mr Drum that it will be released — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms PULFORD — Settle down! It will be released next week, and it will put to shame what you did over the last four years.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am most concerned about today's question time, which I think is really not a great representation of behaviour by members of Parliament in regard to excessive interjections. They are not helpful to the house; they do not enable ministers to actually provide the answers that members are seeking.

Supplementary question

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I look forward to a review that is going to put you lot to shame, after what you did — —

The PRESIDENT — Order!

Mr DRUM — I am repeating her words, President!

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The interjection came from Mr Drum's side of the chamber first.

Mr DRUM — No, it came from over there.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The interjection came from this side first. Mr Drum should get on with it or sit down.

Mr DRUM — I refer the minister to a statement the Premier made upon his election last year that he would govern for all Victorians. Many regional services for regional Victoria have been on hold for 12 months awaiting this review and the government's response, so I ask the minister: why has the government left regional Victoria waiting for nearly 12 months?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I think Mr Drum has no idea what he is talking about. No services have been left on hold. We have been getting Victoria back on track. We have been rebuilding TAFE after what the previous government did to it. We have been rebuilding confidence in regional Victoria — —

Mr O'Donohue — Have you caught the train to Ballarat recently? How is that going for you?

Ms PULFORD — I have been on the train from Ballarat recently. If you would like, we can talk about the regional network development plan. Ours is a government that is governing for the whole of the state. The review was a detailed piece of work, with 61 recommendations canvassing a broad range of issues. I am sure Mr Drum will be most interested in reading it next week and indeed the government's response to it, and I imagine he will probably blush.

Government-subsidised training

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills. Does the minister stand by the statement he made in his letter to the Australian Council for Private Education and Training on 20 November last year that Labor would grow Victoria's training system in 2015?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I think that is exactly the same question that Mr Ramsay asked me not that long ago. It is the same letter. You had better check *Hansard* on that one.

Do I stand by my statement? I stand by my statement that it was appalling what happened under the previous government and that the training sector was in massive decline. But I do acknowledge that the situation was far worse. The job of cleaning up the rotting of the training system was far harder, the decline in the economy and employer satisfaction was far greater than the previous government let on, and on top of that we have had this massive rotting under the federal coalition government of VET FEE-HELP, where we have seen massive numbers of young people who should be entering vocational education and training being sucked into online diplomas they never complete, diplomas that in some cases are costing \$1 million per completion.

Supplementary question

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — President, I seek your guidance. If I wanted to move that the minister's answer be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting, do I do that now or after the supplementary question?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will hear your supplementary question first.

Mr MORRIS — Given that the *Victorian Training Market Report 2015 Half-Year* details that the number of students in government-subsidised training has declined by 12 per cent in 2015 compared to the same period in 2014, does the minister acknowledge that his promise to grow enrolments in 2015 is now a broken promise?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I do not acknowledge that whatsoever. What I do acknowledge is that the legacy of cuts to TAFE and the shambolic policies of the previous government continue to flow through the training system. It is an interesting thing. When I released the market monitoring report the shadow spokesperson in the other house said that this was a broken commitment, that the Labor government committed to putting in an additional \$1.2 billion. That is not true, not true, not true. But I will acknowledge that the legacy of shambolic policy decisions and cuts by the former government is biting harder than we thought in the TAFE and training sector.

Ordered that answers be considered next day on motion of Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan).

Cage fighting

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Families and Children. As the minister responsible for the child protection system is effectively the parent of children in out-of-home care in Victoria, will children under the minister's care be prohibited from attending the violent, brutal and bloody cage fighting event in Victoria this weekend?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question. As I said yesterday, it is pretty clear that the member is an extremely slow learner. We covered this issue at some length — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Minister, I have got to say that I took umbrage at the way Mr Drum opened his supplementary question, and I think with due cause. But I do understand why he opened that way because a reference to 'you lot' is just not appropriate. It is provocative and it makes it very difficult for me to stop people from interjecting if you have that sort of provocation. I think the same of the opening gambit to this answer. To describe a member in such a derogatory way is just not on. It is not necessary. It does not add to

the value of the house's consideration of the matter. This might be a minister's view, but I do not think it is a view we need shared with the house.

Ms MIKAKOS — The member's question is actually premised on an incorrect understanding of the legislation. Firstly, I am not the legal parent of children in out-of-home care. The secretary of my department, the Department of Health and Human Services, is in fact the legal parent. But I take my responsibilities as the Minister for Families and Children extremely seriously.

We have seen from the Liberal Party's election review the member's own party acknowledging the dithering that occurred during the last four years, including in terms of child protection and out-of-home care — complete dithering. In response to that, we have inherited a system that is facing many pressures and challenges, and I have got on with the job of addressing those issues from day one. A 17 per cent increase in the child protection and family services budget — —

Ms Crozier — On a point of order, President, as to the relevance of the minister's answer in relation to my question, which was quite specific.

Ms MIKAKOS — On the point of order, President, the member prefaced her question by making assertions about my responsibility under the legislation. I am in fact explaining to the member what my responsibility is. I am outlining to the house that her question was based on an incorrect premise. I am outlining to the house exactly my responsibilities as the Minister for Families and Children, rather than the Minister for Sport's responsibilities as they relate to mixed martial arts.

Ms Crozier — Further on the point of order, President, I would argue that the minister was talking about the previous government and was not outlining her responsibilities. For the last four years she was — —

Ms MIKAKOS — You have interrupted me. I am happy to get on with it and tell you.

Ms Crozier — I will ask the President to make the judgement on that.

The PRESIDENT — Order! On the point of order, I am of the view that Ms Crozier's question was quite specific in terms of one aspect of the minister's responsibility. I do not believe that in posing that question she invited a tour of the minister's other initiatives on this occasion. I will ask Ms Crozier to re-read the question so that we understand exactly what the question is in this case, because it is quite specific. I

would invite the minister to address that question specifically.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — As the minister responsible for the child protection system is effectively the parent of children in out-of-home care in Victoria, will the children under the minister's care be prohibited from attending the violent, brutal and bloody cage fighting event in Victoria this weekend?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — As I was explaining to the member, her question was premised on an incorrect assertion. But I explained to the member yesterday that children were actually able to attend mixed martial arts events during the entire time that her leader was the Minister for Community Services and responsible for the child protection system. The only thing that has occurred since is that the Minister for Sport, as the relevant minister, has permitted octagonal perimeters to be used during mixed martial arts events.

Again, as I explained to the member yesterday, we take the view that parents are able to make the decision as to whether children are able to attend mixed martial arts events, as well as any other sporting events. It is a matter for parents to take those decisions in relation to whether they attend mixed martial arts events.

I would be very surprised if children in out-of-home care were to be attending these events. But we know that children who are in out-of-home care may well be in the care of foster carers. They may well be in the care of kinship carers. Those arrangements have been put in place legally through the Children's Court, and those carers are effectively acting as the legal — —

Ms Wooldridge interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — They may well be acting under Children's Court orders as the legal guardians of those children and therefore have the responsibility to make the appropriate decisions about children in their care and what events they participate in. We take the view that parents and carers are rightly placed to make the decisions as to whether children, in whatever circumstances, are able to attend these events. But the member is ignoring the fact that under the time when her leader was the Minister for Community Services the exact same position applied.

Supplementary question

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her answer, and I ask: has any guidance been provided through the minister or her department to foster, kinship or residential carers in relation to

attending violent activities such as cage fighting, which may result in physical or psychological harm to children in the state's care?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her supplementary question. As I indicated to her in answering the substantive question, carers may well be acting as the legal guardians of these children through orders put in place by the Children's Court. They therefore have a responsibility to act in the best interests of children in their care and to make appropriate decisions as to what events children attend, whether they are sporting events or any other events. We take the view that they are best placed to make decisions about what is in the best interests of children, just like any other parent or guardian in our community.

Disability services

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to Minister Mikakos as the minister representing the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing. Victorians with disability have been and continue to be positioned as different and as a result have faced discrimination on a range of fronts, as the minister is well aware. We are, as a result, more likely to be homeless, victims of assault, chemically or mechanically restrained and denied medical treatments. We are also less likely to be employed, to own our own homes or to have healthy superannuation accounts — or in fact superannuation accounts at all. We have been separated from mainstream debate and from mainstream opportunities like employment. In light of the government's commitment to the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS) and the subsequent expansion of the disability sector in Victoria, what practical steps has the minister undertaken to ensure that the disability sector is employing people with disabilities throughout all levels within the department and throughout the disability service sector?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question, and it is a very important question. I agree with the premise that she outlined as the preamble to her question — that people with disabilities do face a level of discrimination in the community on issues that many of the rest of us in the community take for granted. That includes access to employment opportunities.

We are a government that is committed to building job opportunities within our state. I am very pleased to inform the member that the relevant minister, the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, Mr Foley, is currently working with the Department of Health and

Human Services in the process of engaging with stakeholders in relation to the development of the next state disability plan, for 2017–20. That early engagement process has commenced, and it is anticipated that economic participation will be a key focus of the next plan.

When it comes to the NDIS, the Productivity Commission has anticipated that the disability sector workforce will need to double between now and full implementation of the NDIS in 2019–20. The Productivity Commission has estimated that the whole package of NDIS reforms could increase the employment of people with mild to profound disabilities by 100 000 by 2050.

The introduction of the NDIS will bring a need for different kinds of workers and a shifting workforce profile. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has recognised this and has recently reported that 16 per cent of its workforce identify as living with a disability. Through the NDIS *Integrated Market, Sector and Workforce Strategy* Victoria is working with the commonwealth to build a sufficient and diverse workforce to support people with disability into the future, including the participation of people with disability in the workforce.

The Andrews Labor government has its own work underway, including a review of all of its employment programs, with the aim of ensuring its efforts are targeted and best support the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and economically under-represented into employment, including people with a disability.

Mr Davis — On a point of order, President, the minister is reading directly from a document — word for word. I understand the need for figures, and some detailed background might be very appropriate, but in the circumstances I wonder if the minister might make that document available to the chamber.

Ms MIKAKOS — On the point of order, President, I am referring to notes in response to the member's question. This is a very serious issue. It is an important question. I am very happy to provide the member and the house with the detail in response to the wideranging strategies that the government is putting in place to support people with disabilities into employment. I am very happy to continue with my response as I have 1 minute and 35 seconds remaining.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is not entirely relevant to the point of order. On the point of order, obviously we do not encourage members to read from notes. I must say that this minister very seldom refers to

notes; she provides information to the house on her knowledge of the matters. In this instance, given the question asked — it is an important question for the house — the minister is entitled to refer to copious notes.

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you, President. As I have indicated to the house, Minister Foley has responsibility for the matters that the member has canvassed in her question. I know that my ministerial colleague takes these matters very seriously, as does the member herself, and I thank her for asking me this question and giving me the opportunity to inform the house about the range of strategies that our government has in place to provide further employment opportunities for people with disabilities. As I indicated right at the outset, sadly it is the case that people with disabilities do face a level of discrimination in a range of ways, including access to employment opportunities.

I assure the member that there is a range of initiatives underway, including the Back to Work scheme, which recently had its eligible employee categories expanded to include people in receipt of a disability pension. The government has a range of strategies in place to give people with disabilities opportunities to access employment. I look forward to seeing the next phase of the state disability plan being finalised by Minister Foley, and I am sure that he will be very happy to provide the member with further information once that state disability plan is finalised.

Supplementary question

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her comprehensive answer. I seek further clarification through my supplementary. As the minister is probably aware, there is a long-running theme within the disability sector, and it is the phrase 'Nothing about us without us'. It is essential that the direct voices of people with disabilities are heard. Will the minister commit, through the state disability plan, to establishing a targeted strategy on employing people with disabilities throughout all levels of the department, from executive management to policy development and from planners to administrators?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her supplementary question. Whilst I indicated in answer to the substantive question that Minister Foley is at the early stages of engagement around the development of the next phase of the disability plan, I am certain that that will involve extensive consultation with people with disabilities themselves and various advocacy organisations. I am

happy to convey the request of the member for further details about that to the minister. However, in relation to the specifics of targets to be set in terms of employment in the Department of Health and Human Services, I will need to pass on that request to the minister for further response.

It is important to understand that as part of the NDIS rollout a lot of responsibilities are transferring to the NDIA, which is a national body. As I indicated in my response earlier, it is indicating that it has a significant number of people with disability already working for it. I hope that will continue to grow in the future.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation board

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My question is for the Special Minister of State. According to the Tobacco Act 1987 the VicHealth board must consist of 11 health and other professionals and 3 members of Parliament who are appointed for three years. The VicHealth website currently outlines seven board members and no members of Parliament, and this might suggest that board elections are overdue and numbers are waning. The previous MPs to sit on the board were elected on 30 June 2011, so it appears that it is well over a year since the election of MPs to the board should have occurred. My question for the minister is: why has the government failed to call a joint sitting of Parliament to elect MPs to the VicHealth board despite it being a year overdue and the government claiming to be committed to improving governance?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Ms Hartland for her expression of interest in, if not nomination for, a position on the VicHealth board. Certainly that is how I understand her interest and her inquiry. I certainly know that my colleague the Minister for Health will understand her expression of interest.

I know from past practice, since as far back as 1987, there has been what was established at that point in time a beyond bipartisan or tripartisan approach to appointments to that board. In this current Parliament the normal allocation on that basis is not as easy as perhaps it was in 1987 and may actually warrant some scrutiny and some consideration. It may be that I will be subjected to a supplementary question from the crossbench or from coalition members in the days to come about when this issue may be resolved. I will certainly talk to my colleague the Minister for Health about the best way in which this matter can be pursued and advise the member accordingly.

Supplementary question

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — Yes, I certainly am a nomination for that board; there is no doubt about that. But considering that on 17 March this year the health minister had a letter read out in this chamber asking for a joint sitting and there has been no correspondence and no discussion since then — that is now some eight months ago — you would think that it was time to actually get on with this discussion. I ask: when will it be that this discussion will occur, and when can we expect the joint sitting to happen?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — If these expressions of interest had been subjected to a due diligence process, at least by the time frame it looks as if it is thorough. If nothing else, we can actually have some confidence that there has been a lot of care and consideration given to the resolution of these matters. As I indicated in my substantive answer, I will talk to my colleague and provide the house, not only the member but the house, with some confidence about this. I would think that Ms Hartland's reminder of the appropriateness of getting on top of this issue is a point well made.

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation board

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My next question is also for the Special Minister of State. According to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011, the board must consist of between four and eight appointed members and three elected members of Parliament. Members of Parliament sit for four years or less and cease sitting when the Legislative Assembly is dissolved for an election. Members of Parliament are elected by the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council jointly and appointed by the Governor in Council. This has not occurred since the new Parliament opened last year — and yes, I am also a nominee for this board. Again there has been correspondence but there has not been a joint sitting, and we are talking about a year in which this board also has not had any representation.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I am not going to be mischievous and suggest that the reason we have confusion is that we have seen nominations from Ms Springle, Ms Dunn, Ms Pennicuik and the crossbench. That would be a facetious answer.

Ms Springle interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — Exactly. In fact they have self-declared that they are not nominees, so there is not

an overly crowded marketplace from the Greens perspective, but there may be an overly crowded place among the aspirations across the Parliament. But again in this instance I will talk to my colleague the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and ask her for the timetable and the process by which she believes that that issue will be proceeded with. I could almost pre-empt where the member's supplementary question will go, even though I am volunteering to her that she may be reminding us that this is an issue of a timely nature that should be resolved. I will encourage this issue to be resolved and come back to the house with further information when it is available to me.

Supplementary question

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister. It may seem to be quite a jovial subject to him, but these are two acts of Parliament which are required to be complied with, so can I ask the minister to actually write to this chamber before the next sitting week to outline when the joint sittings will occur and how they will be proceeded with?

The PRESIDENT — Order! Minister, will you write?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Yes, in fact, one way or another. In terms of the slap across the wrist that I have just received for my flippant response, can I say that I think this issue should be resolved in a formal way and we should be clear about it. Whether that formal notification occurs from me or my ministerial colleagues, I will ensure that it takes place.

Legislative Assembly by-elections

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Special Minister of State, Mr Jennings, representing the Premier. In August this year former Premier Denis Napthine, the then sitting member for South-West Coast in the Assembly, and the then member for Polwarth in the Assembly, Terry Mulder, announced their respective retirements, triggering by-elections that took place in late October — by-elections that the community did not want and by-elections that failed to generate any interest. Recently Dr Napthine said he was retiring after he was approached to retire immediately if he was not going to contest the 2018 election, to allow a fresh person into the seat. My question is: how much did the South-West Coast and Polwarth by-elections cost the Victorian taxpayer?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Purcell for the question. I do not know the amount that was spent on these by-elections, but in fact Mr Somyurek from the back bench, in terms of his engagement with electoral matters in the past, knows the benchmark. The benchmark is around \$300 000 that each by-election costs, and so you would anticipate — —

Ms Wooldridge interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — Do not be too defensive about this, because I am happy to acknowledge that in fact there have been some by-elections in previous Parliaments that the Labor Party has been party to. In terms of the cost effectiveness and the desirability of by-elections for the electorate, I share the concern that has been expressed by the member. In fact under normal circumstances the community may not be overly impressed by the number of times the electorate is called upon to exercise its obligations in relation to democracy in circumstances where members do not go their full-term, and in this Parliament there has already been probably cumulatively \$1 million spent through the Victorian Electoral Commission on the basis of the leadership of the previous government deciding not to go full term.

That is obviously something that Mr Purcell is concerned about, something that the community may be concerned about and it is certainly something that was part of the thinking behind the constitutional reform that led to the casual vacancies that occur within this chamber being filled by the nominee of the party that — —

Mr Davis — You are surely not suggesting that for the lower house.

Mr JENNINGS — I am quite okay to keep talking without Mr Davis interjecting. I am actually just saying that that was the logic that underpinned why we chose to fill casual vacancies that occur on the basis of the nomination of parties in this chamber. Mr Davis, Mr Finn and Mr Ondarchie have urged me in this question time to give up, and if I chose to give up, in fact it would be relatively cheap for me to be replaced — —

Mr Finn — We would miss you.

Mr JENNINGS — Thank you for your endorsement, but I think the point is well made that in fact we should look at the ways in which we can reduce the burden, either in terms of the cost to the community or indeed to try to find the mechanisms by which we can prevent it through the culture, the discipline and the approach of perhaps senior members of government

who actually go to the electorate, for them to actually think through the consequences of that.

I am pretty clear how I will gear up for the next election; I am pretty clear about that. But I think it is a point well made that the community has on a number of occasions expressed its lack of enthusiasm for being wheeled out to the ballot box. Having said that, we are actually well blessed in Victoria by a high voter participation rate. If the participation rate in the most recent by-elections was over 90, as I have been encouraged to think about, that is actually something about which we can be pleased — that people do not reserve the right to stay at home, and therefore the decision at the ballot box is validated by popular outcome.

There are some swings and roundabouts in this. But in terms of our electoral reform in the future, we should be alive to reducing the cost to the taxpayer and reducing the degree of dislocation. The way these matters should be dealt with appropriately is a valid issue to be raised in this chamber, despite those people who just blithely say, ‘No, no problem here’. There is a problem, and we should be responsive to it.

Supplementary question

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I thank the minister for his response and acknowledge the \$900 000 to \$1 million that has been spent on the three by-elections, money that I do believe could be spent in a better way. I also understand that often there are good reasons for standing down, such as illness or family circumstances, but when it is elective my community asks, ‘Why should the taxpayer foot that bill?’. My supplementary question therefore is: will the government consider changes to the rules to stop members from stepping down just because they find themselves in opposition and costing the people of Victoria many hundreds of thousands of dollars?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — In my substantive answer I already did volunteer that anybody who potentially is at the end of their career and is solely judging their future on the basis of the electoral fortunes of their political party in relation to the desirability of going into the next term should reflect on that. They should actively reflect on that in terms of whether they have come to the end of their shelf life.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I have not named any individuals here. I have nominated that it occurred in the last Parliament and I have indicated that it has

occurred in this Parliament. I have not scapegoated or isolated any individual. But all of us should think about that, and all of us should reflect on electoral reforms in the future that actually deliver the result that Mr Purcell is pursuing on behalf of his community.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I have written answers to the following questions: 867, 1640–7, 2245, 2246, 2425, 2433, 2434, 2438, 2453, 2455, 2495, 2582, 2590–3, 2595, 2600, 2615 and 3255–306.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I have a number of questions that were posed to the Minister for Families and Children for the Minister for Health — questions 571, 572, 733, 734, 868 and 872. These are all questions that you have reinstated at least once, President, and in some instances twice. They are now all overdue. I have been in contact with the Minister for Health to alert her that these questions have not yet been answered, and I ask you to direct the minister responsible to ensure that these questions are answered on a timely basis.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Has the member referred the matter to the minister? Has the member written to the minister?

Ms WOOLDRIDGE — I have, by email.

Ms Mikakos — You have written to the minister?

Ms WOOLDRIDGE — I have.

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — Obviously the member is aware that these questions on notice relate to another minister. I am happy to follow those up with the direct minister involved and seek a response in a timely way. I point out to the member that at the time of the last election I had questions on notice that were overdue to me that were two years old. The member would be well aware that ministers in our government have been making a considerable effort to respond to questions on notice in a far timelier way than we ever had the courtesy of receiving them.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Written responses

The PRESIDENT — Order! I indicate that in terms of today’s questions I would seek a written response

from Mr Jennings in respect of Ms Fitzherbert's supplementary question, which was whether or not there were any other costs in addition to interest payable as part of the line of credit when the line of credit ends. I think that in both his substantive answer and his answer to the two supplementaries Mr Jennings gave a fair indication of the government's view of that transaction and addressed that matter — perhaps not to the satisfaction of the member or the opposition. Nonetheless I think the minister did address that matter. In respect of the specific question about other costs, I think the minister might well investigate those to the benefit of the house. That is the only question I would seek to have a written response to today.

I indicate, though, that in regard to Ms Hartland's two questions and supplementary questions, in some ways I take some blame for the joint sitting not having occurred. We did receive correspondence from the ministers and I did follow up with the other house about convening a joint sitting on more than one occasion, but I must say that those follow-ups have not been recent. They were earlier this year, and I share Ms Hartland's concern — and I think the minister has indicated the same — that it is unfortunate that this time has elapsed and that the two houses have not met and addressed their obligation to provide the nominees to those organisations under the legislation. So in conjunction with the Leader of the Government I will seek to secure that joint sitting at the earliest opportunity.

Ms Wooldridge — On a point of order, President, I seek your consideration on reinstating the supplementary question for Mr Rich-Phillips's question. You very generously allowed the Leader of the Government to extend his response quite substantially beyond the minute that was on the clock, and he spent the entire time talking about the deficit. The question related to further costs and liabilities for the east–west link, and I put it to you that it may be worth reviewing the transcript in relation to the Leader of the Government's failure to respond to the supplementary question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will review the record, but I will probably not be in a position to make a determination on that today. Essentially I felt that the minister had answered that question. Again, it might not have been to the satisfaction of the opposition in terms of the description of this funding, but what the minister put to the house was that in fact this was a reallocation of funds that were already in place — of a loan facility that was already in place. It was a redirecting of those funds, and therefore there was a definitional issue between how the opposition describes that position and how the government describes that

position. I accept that the minister has put a point of view to the house, and I believe his point of view was apposite to the question, albeit that it might not have met the opposition's criteria in terms of its definition of what that transaction was all about and the circumstances surrounding the relocation of loan funds that were already in place, as the minister said, when the government came to office.

I will have a look at it, but I would also suggest that opposition members have a look at the text in *Hansard* to understand whether or not the line of questioning ought to be pursued in another way to actually address the government's position on that transaction — its premise that in fact it is a reallocation of those loan funds that were in place when Labor came to government and therefore not an additional impost on Victorian taxpayers but rather, as I said, an adjustment in terms of those finances. I accept that opposition members would not be happy with that and that their definition of this transaction is quite different, but I think that is a matter of debate rather than a situation where I would be seeking to have a revised answer. I will look at it tomorrow.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Northern Metropolitan Region

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport. It concerns the opening date for the Mernda rail extension which I recall many now-government MPs, including Ms Mikakos, made big statements about building. They said there would be 8 kilometres of new duplicated track, full grade separations, a new station at Mernda and an additional station. I remember the commitment of the member for Yan Yean in the Assembly on 6 May 2015 when she said it would be completed in 2018 — three years from now to complete 8 kilometres when it took them 13 years to build 3.5 kilometres.

Government members said they would not waste a day. It is almost 12 months since this government came to office, and how much of that 8-kilometre track has been done? Not 1 centimetre. So I ask the minister if she could advise me, so I can advise the constituents in Melbourne's north: what will be the opening date for the Mernda rail extension?

Northern Victoria Region

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question goes to the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing and is in relation to home and community

care. I have been contacted by the City of Greater Shepparton, which has been put in a situation where it is going to have to cut the hours it contributes to home and community care packages for its constituents. Whilst there have been some cuts in the funding coming through, the federal government funding cuts are absolutely minimal. What has happened, though, is that the rate per hour has risen dramatically, and this is a state government issue. I ask the minister to explain to me so that I can tell the City of Greater Shepparton why the city is now being charged so much for the schedule it has to deliver in relation to the home and community care program, forcing it to cut the hours dramatically.

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Police and concerns current policing on the Bellarine Peninsula. Given the Andrews government's refusal to provide CCTV cameras to towns such as Drysdale and Ocean Grove, given that the member for Bellarine in the other place, Lisa Neville, promised but has not delivered 16-hour police stations to Drysdale, Queenscliff and Portarlington, and given that the Andrews government has failed to deliver the extra police needed for the Geelong region despite the increase in crime, I ask the minister: exactly when will the Andrews government meet the clear and unequivocal election promise that these three police stations will open 16 hours a day?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. On 24 February I asked the minister to update me and the house as to what was happening with regard to the management and oversight of the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve, and the minister replied that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning was working closely with the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve Trust to improve its governance arrangements, including development of an appropriate suite of documents that meet good governance practices for public sector entities. Unfortunately neither I nor anybody else in the City of Glen Eira or among the public of Victoria is aware of any developments in this regard. The trustees of the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve have historically constituted a very secretive organisation, and it is time the minister released public information as to how governance of the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve is to come into the 21st century.

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The constituency question I would like to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it is in relation to the redevelopment of the Frankston railway station, which has been long in the making and discussion. Basically there is probably a lack of leadership that needs to be filled by an experienced stakeholder, such as the Metropolitan Planning Authority. Bruce Billson, the federal member for Dunkley, has written to the minister asking him to give this task to the Metropolitan Planning Authority — that is, to take over the state government project to renovate the Frankston railway station precinct to ensure that this opportunity to revitalise Frankston as a key metropolitan activity centre is not lost. I think it is an excellent idea, and I ask the minister whether he would consider this and whether he would do so at the earliest possible opportunity so that no further time is lost and in order that progress on this wonderful opportunity be made.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Route 8 tram

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of Victoria draws the attention of the house to strong community support to keep the no. 8 tram route, noting:

1. the no. 8 tram route has been in operation since 1927 and is one of Melbourne's busiest tram routes;
2. the below-listed petitioners express extreme concern at the Andrews Labor government to abolish the no. 8 tram route and demand that the Andrews government step back from its planned abolition of the no. 8 tram and commit to the permanent maintenance of this route along Toorak Road, St Kilda Road and Swanston Street;
3. that promises to strengthen public transport will not be advanced by moving resources from one route to another, but instead should see the addition of new services to those currently provided.

The petitioners therefore call on the Legislative Council to urge the Andrews Labor government to stop their abolition of the no. 8 tram route.

**By Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan)
(242 signatures).**

Laid on table.

Grand Final Friday

To the Honourable the President and members of the Legislative Council assembled in Parliament:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, call on the Legislative Council of Victoria to note the harmful impacts of the decision by the Daniel Andrews Labor government to declare new public holidays in Victoria.

At a time of high and rising unemployment and when many businesses are already doing it tough, Daniel Andrews has imposed a major new cost that will see many businesses close their doors for the day, employees lose much-needed shifts and inflict significant damage on our state's economy.

The Andrews government's own assessment of the grand final eve public holiday parade put the cost of the holiday to Victoria at up to \$898 million per year with additional salary costs.

The impact of these additional costs will not be restricted to businesses, with local government and hospitals also affected leaving ratepayers and the community to foot the bill.

We therefore call on the Daniel Andrews Labor government to reverse its decision to impose the grand final eve public holiday.

**By Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan)
(4 signatures).**

Laid on table.

Melbourne Metro rail project

To the Honourable the President and members of the Legislative Council assembled in Parliament:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, call on the Legislative Council of Victoria to note the potential harmful impacts on the iconic Fawkner Park of the Daniel Andrews Labor government's Melbourne Metro rail project, including having the park alienated for the long duration of tunnelling works for the storage of tunnel spoil and as a staging post for trucks, tractors and heavy earthmoving equipment.

This was confirmed to the Parliament by the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, 20 October 2015, when he said: 'There will be some properties procured, and there will also be the requirement for some work staging, as I believe, to occur in Fawkner Park. I certainly know that within the construction and engineering phase of the proposal there may be some impact upon local amenity for some time during the course of construction'.

We therefore call on the Daniel Andrews Labor government to reverse its decision to use Fawkner Park as a spoil dump and staging point for heavy machinery for the tunnelling of the Melbourne Metro rail project and to further guarantee, in particular, that there will be no trees removed from Fawkner Park or otherwise adversely impacted and no restrictions to public access.

**By Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan)
(12 signatures).**

Laid on table.

Melbourne Metro rail project

To the Honourable the President and members of the Legislative Council assembled in Parliament:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, call on the Legislative Council of Victoria to note:

the projected massive population growth in the Forest Hill precinct of the City of Stonnington, adjacent to the South Yarra railway station;

that many apartments have been permitted to be constructed without car parks due to the proximity of the South Yarra station with its existing connection to four rail lines, the Sandringham, Frankston, Pakenham and Cranbourne lines; and

the short-sighted and illogical decision of the state government to remove access to the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines from South Yarra which will reduce services and direct travel options from South Yarra station, adding time and complexity for local train commuters.

We therefore call on the Daniel Andrews Labor government to avoid making an historic mistake and reverse its decision to remove access to the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines from South Yarra station and instead include South Yarra station in the Melbourne metro link development proposal.

**By Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan)
(25 signatures).**

Laid on table.

Adoption legislation

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council clause 17 of the Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015.

Clause 17 forces religious bodies to provide same-sex adoption services contrary to the beliefs and practices of their religion by removing the freedom of religion protections under the Equal Opportunity Act. The clause:

- (a) is unnecessary to enable same-sex adoption in Victoria because government and secular agencies will provide same-sex adoptions;
- (b) is an unjustifiable attack on freedom of choice, conscience and religion of relinquishing birth parents, faith-based adoption agencies and employees of those adoption agencies;
- (c) will have the practical effect of forcing some faith-based adoption agencies to close, reducing the number and diversity of adoption service providers in Victoria; and
- (d) will deny or limit the ability of relinquishing birth parents to prefer that their child is raised by a mother and a father.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council:

- (a) omit clause 17 which amends the Equal Opportunity Act and remove the reference to that purpose in the long title of the bill; and
- (b) add a new clause preventing the state discriminating in any way against adoption agencies which arrange adoptions to a male and female couple if that is done in accordance with the conscientious or religious beliefs of the agency or of the relinquishing birth parents.

By Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan)
(232 signatures).

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament —

Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act 1968 — No. 127.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — No. 126.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 123 and 127.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Remembrance Day

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — May I start with ‘Lest we forget’. Today I had the honour of attending the Diamond Creek-Doreen RSL sub-branch Remembrance Day service at Laurimar Primary School. What an amazing event it was, with over 1000 primary schoolchildren led by their principal, Jason McBean, and the wonderful staff. It was quite a memorial service, conducted with honour and respect towards those who have gone before us.

I commend John and Tricia Langford. John is the outgoing president of the Diamond Creek-Doreen RSL. His contribution to that area has been substantial in getting up the new memorial outside the Laurimar Primary School and coordinating the team. He leaves a wonderful legacy as he retires and he and Tricia move to Inverloch. On behalf of the local community I say to John and Tricia thank you and well done. We are proud of your commitment not just to that of the Returned Services League but also to the schoolchildren and the community who are learning from your legacy in remembering those who have gone before us and who offered the complete sacrifice so that we in Australia may live this life in peace. Lest we forget.

Remembrance Day

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I would like to thank the government which, in consultation with all parties, rearranged the schedule today to allow members to attend local Remembrance Day events. It is important that after 97 years we are still able to take time out of our busy lives to pause on 11 November to remember the 9 million combatants and 7 million civilians who died in World War I, and the millions who have died or been injured in conflicts since then.

Today I attended the service at the Caulfield RSL, where my grandfather was a founding member and my father also a long-term member. It is 10 years today since my father attended his last Remembrance Day at the Shrine of Remembrance. He was very frail but was determined to attend as he always did. By chance, he was interviewed by ABC TV, to which he said that he hoped the young people who were there were never caught up in a war as he had been.

As Caulfield RSL president Bob Larkin said today:

As we are here today commemorating the signing of the armistice ...

We ... remember the damage that is wrought by war and ... the ordinary men and women who fought against —

dictators and authoritarians —

and then either lost their lives, or survived, though often scared physically or mentally.

Whilst nearly a century has passed since the signing of the armistice, war in one form or another has continued unabated, and always it is the innocent who suffer.

Remembrance Day

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — We remember the sacrifices of the men and women who have served and who are now serving to defend our country and way of life. May we continue to cherish the freedom for which they fought on this Remembrance Day. Lest we forget. It was great to see so many services so well attended in particular by our young children.

Diwali festival

Mrs PEULICH — I also wish to take this opportunity to extend on behalf of the Liberal-Nationals coalition in my role as the shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs our very best to members of the Indian community who are celebrating Diwali, which is an uplifting and joyous festival celebrated by the Hindu

community. I would also like to congratulate young Sahana Rudresh, who won first prize in the essay competition conducted by Celebrate India. She was presented with this award at the fantastic Diwali festival at Federation Square, which I had the pleasure of attending and addressing last weekend.

Victorian Multicultural Commission

Mrs PEULICH — Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of the new appointees to the Victorian Multicultural Commission. There is some considerable talent there. I also extend my thanks and gratitude to those who have served but who have not been reappointed. I look forward to them continuing to make a contribution to our multicultural communities in the very many roles they play. Hopefully they will continue to play them because we respect and appreciate their wisdom, talent and dedication to our multicultural policies.

Cage fighting

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My members statement today is a follow-up to my question yesterday of the minister regarding the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) and the ability for children under the age of 18 to be admitted to that event. I received a response this morning from the minister, which states:

The Commission for Children and Young People is an independent statutory body. The commission does not require a request from the minister to comment on such matters.

While I am aware that that is the case, this is an entirely disappointing response. Given there are restrictions on all other sorts of forms of entertainment in our society, from the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes to the watching of TV shows, films, the playing of some classifications of computer games, as well as gambling and other activities such as driving a vehicle and when we can start to work — even how we deal with our relationships such as when we can enter into marriage and intimate relationships — I do not find this response that we cannot regulate this sort of activity appropriate. The UFC should not be seen as any other sport, given the gratuitous nature of the activities and how violent they are.

If the minister is not prepared to take leadership on this matter, the Greens will, and I will be writing to the commissioner for children and young people and asking him to look into the matter of whether it is appropriate for any child under the age of 18 to be witnessing this sort of gratuitous violence.

Mirboo North Secondary College

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — Recently my colleagues in the other place Danny O'Brien, the member for Gippsland South, and Russell Northe, the member for Morwell, and I had the privilege of attending a thought-provoking forum at Mirboo North Secondary College of year 11 Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL) students. They focused on the huge problem of homelessness in Australia. The students identified that over 105 000 people of varying ages and backgrounds find themselves on the streets on any given night, with little or no hope of receiving appropriate housing.

Under the guidance of VCAL coordinator Andrew McGrath, the students have been making a difference and breaking down barriers since 2008. Some of their endeavours have included sponsoring the Philippines team in the Homeless World Cup, excursions to Melbourne City Mission and the Salvation Army street tour, sleeping rough at school to raise funds for the 'Give a Damn, Give a Can' campaign, joining Quantum Support Services in their local street soccer initiatives and raising funds and donating 10 backpack beds to Swags for Homeless.

Students identified two main issues: one, the lack of cohesiveness between the associated organisations, and two, the considerable lack of housing. The students of Mirboo North would like to form a panel of various organisations to start talking about this issue as a collective. They plan on inviting local business owners, participants from other schools and CEOs to lead the way by sleeping rough for one night — they hope to run an event in Gippsland similar to Sleep at the G.

I commend the staff and students at Mirboo North Secondary College on their outstanding social conscience and their ongoing commitment.

POLICE NUMBERS

Debate resumed from 21 October; motion of Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria):

That this house notes —

- (1) in November 2014, when the coalition left government there were 13 151 equivalent full-time sworn police officers in Victoria;
- (2) as at the end of June 2015 there were 13 151 equivalent full-time sworn police officers in Victoria;
- (3) the failure of the Andrews Labor government to add even one additional sworn police member despite population growth of approximately 100 000 per annum and the challenges of terrorism, ice and family violence;

- (4) that while the Premier, Daniel Andrews, MP, has not prioritised additional police, he has found hundreds of millions of dollars to not build a road and \$20 million for a new logo; and
- (5) the failure of Labor to invest in more police stands in stark contrast to the coalition's record of 1900 additional police and 950 protective services officers during its term in office.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I appreciate the opportunity to start where I finished off in the last sitting week in relation to the motion put forward by Mr O'Donohue. I will give a very brief summary in relation to my contribution from the last sitting week: I note and I endorse the concerns Mr O'Donohue has raised in the motion in relation to police numbers.

I have seen that in the areas that I represent, particularly on the Bellarine Peninsula and in Geelong, where there has been a significant increase in crime, we have seen no significant increase in police resourcing. In a constituency question this afternoon I raised concerns around appropriate police numbers for Geelong and the Bellarine region, also given the election commitment that the member for Bellarine in the other place, Lisa Neville, made in relation to providing 16-hour police services to three police stations on the Bellarine — those being Queenscliff, Drysdale and Portarlington — which she has not met.

There is concern, certainly, in the areas that I represent about policing, and I note that Mr O'Donohue has noted that there has been no significant increase in sworn police numbers for the last 12 months or in fact since the Andrews government has been in power. In fact, I think it has been indicated there is not one increase in police numbers from the 13 151 full-time equivalent sworn police officers in Victoria as at the end of June 2015. So we do have a significant problem here.

We had a significant commitment by the Baillieu-Napthine governments in relation to police numbers exceeding the 1700 that we committed to, as well as the 940 protective services officers. We made giant steps in expanding the police resources during our term of government, and sadly we have seen so far during the term of the Andrews government no significant increase in police resources. That has been consistent with this increase in the crime rate, so I fully support this motion. I have identified the areas of concern in my region, and I look forward to the chamber supporting this motion.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Mr O'Donohue's motion asks us to take note of several points with regard to police numbers. I have certainly

had a look myself at the police numbers, and I confirm that Mr O'Donohue's numbers are close to, but not exactly, the numbers that I have been able to find from the Victoria Police statistics — police by location. But anyway we are only quibbling by a number of some tens, so it is not much different — —

Mr O'Donohue — I will give you my FOI.

Ms PENNICUIK — Mr O'Donohue says there is an FOI. You do not really need an FOI; the numbers are freely available. Around 13 140 is the number that I have been able to uncover, and that is the number as at March this year. That is the latest that I have been able to find. I note that that is the number of sworn police. Of course there are additional personnel in terms of the recruits and of course the protective services officers. There are 1177 of those, which includes those in training. Again that is as of March this year.

The Greens do of course support adequate numbers of police according to population, and of course as population increases then police numbers should too. The same should be said of teachers, of nurses, of ambulance drivers, of firefighters, of Parks Victoria staff and of all members of the public service in terms of coping with or assisting the public with all the services that the government provides.

But the question of where they are deployed should be a matter for the Chief Commissioner of Police in consultation with the Police Association Victoria and of course with local government and other areas of the community, but it should not necessarily be up to politicians to decide where police and police personnel are deployed. We do need the separation between Parliament and the police command with regard to that.

In a recent survey conducted by the police association in June and July of this year, which was responded to by more than 3500 members, more than three-quarters of the members reported being assaulted on the job in the last three years and more than 80 per cent feel more vulnerable and at risk than three years ago. In addition, with increases in family violence incidents or reporting, which it appears takes up around 70 per cent of the time on a regular shift, there is a strain on police resources as well as an increase in assaults on officers. Members are also reporting high rates of stress and trauma as a result of the nature of police work. I take the opportunity to acknowledge the work of the police and protective services officers who are called out to deal with often very difficult issues. These are the issues we should be focusing on rather than just raw numbers of police.

Police cells are overcrowded and prisons are overcrowded due to the unfair burden placed on police and prisons by the sentencing regime put in place by the previous government. Officers are also reporting stress, and many are on stress leave. In the week that Mr O'Donohue's motion was tabled in the house, which was two weeks ago, I was listening to Chief Commissioner Ashton on ABC radio, which was in the same week that, sadly, a young policewoman had taken her own life. As he was being interviewed on ABC radio, other police and former police called in, talking about the stresses of the job and how former police had found that they did not get enough support with regard to these issues and that they therefore had felt that they had to leave the police force.

I have raised these issues with the Minister for Police by way of questions on notice, and I have had a response from the minister with regard to the type of training and support that is in place for police who are suffering from trauma and stress as a result of events, issues and troubles that they have had to face in their everyday lives as police men and women. The minister has referred me to programs such as CopSmart and Resilience that are designed to increase protective factors and promote access by police personnel to support for mental health conditions — and indeed the chief commissioner was talking about those in the radio interview. However, I still think there is a need for more resources to be put towards these programs to assist police with the trauma and stress that can result from their daily work.

I am speaking about this because while it may be that we are well able to recruit police — and that is at the heart of Mr O'Donohue's motion — the difficulty may be in retaining them. While there are police being recruited, there are also others leaving for whatever reason. The particular reasons that are being raised by the police association in its survey and by police members speaking on the radio are serious issues. We need to be looking at how to keep police supported and at their being able to continue in their work. This makes the adequate resourcing of Victoria Police more complex than simply increasing numbers based on the increase in population.

Interestingly, the motion talks about the number of police and the growth of the population of Victoria at around 100 000 per annum, which I think is correct; Victoria's population growth is around 100 000 per annum. However, at paragraph 4 the motion diverges and refers to \$20 million in funding for a new logo for the state of Victoria, which I do not think has much to do with the motion.

Mr O'Donohue — Money doesn't grow on trees.

Ms PENNICUIK — Money does not grow on trees, says a member of the party that was happy to spend \$50 million a year on the Australian Formula One Grand Prix, for example. Under the previous government hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted on that event. But whether people felt there was a need for a new logo or whether they are impressed by it, the Greens could say that the shape of the new logo is good but it is upside down and perhaps not the right colour.

Going back to the serious issue of the motion, I am happy to refer to the point that Mr O'Donohue raised, but there are more complex issues involved in the resourcing of police. That is not only in terms of raw numbers but also the way the chief commissioner, in consultation with the police association, chooses to deploy police. That could be to different kinds of working groups focused on particular issues in the community, such as family violence or drugs, bearing in mind that the Greens would like to see a more health-focused approach to tackling drugs, and the police have called for this as well.

I think Mr O'Donohue's motion is oversimplified. There are many complexities around this issue. Of course police numbers need to stay up, as I mentioned at the start of my contribution, and increase in line with population growth, as is the case with other essential services workers, such as nurses, teachers, ambulance drivers, firefighters et cetera.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I am going to keep my comments on the motion very brief, given we have a truncated day as a result of the house agreeing that Remembrance Day requires special attention. It is important to maximise opportunities for members to attend their local services, and many members were fortunate enough to be able to do that today.

I would like to commend Mr O'Donohue for the work he has been doing in this area and for bringing this motion before the house. The performance of the former government in the area of law and order and policing was exceptional. One of its hallmarks was the introduction of protective services officers (PSOs) at railway stations. Initially it was opposed by the police, but it took enormous pressure off them. It freed up resources so that they could devote more resources to doing their job. Unfortunately, with Victoria's population growing by 100 000 every year, there is now a need for additional police resourcing, and that is reflected across the system.

Ms Pennicuik suggested in her contribution that we ease up on some crimes. Without anticipating the debate, later on we will hear a case put forward by Ms Patten for the referral of a whole range of matters to do with illicit drugs and legislation pertaining to drugs to an all-party committee. This is presumably intended to lessen the obligation for police to prosecute the use of drugs. I think Ms Patten holds the view that there is a range of drugs that need to be legalised. I and most of the community hold a very different view: that the police need to be more proactive. They need to send a very strong message to the community that the use of illicit drugs is not acceptable. Those who find themselves regrettably suffering an addiction require additional support and resourcing for their rehabilitation.

In terms of the additional sworn police Mr O'Donohue is calling for in this motion, we are clearly facing certain challenges — family violence, terrorism and ice — that require special efforts. Without reflecting on the Royal Commission into Family Violence, it is regrettable that there is not going to be an investigation of the causes of family violence. I find it very difficult to understand how one could develop enlightened and well-targeted recommendations in those circumstances, especially when we consider the dynamics of multiculturalism and the way domestic violence can be embedded in cultural practices. This message has been conveyed to me throughout the multicultural communities.

Every parent's nightmare is that their child becomes a victim of ice. There are people who believe it is not an epidemic. I believe that it is. Any substance that is so gripping, that can lead to such horrendous transformation of character and destroy lives so quickly has got to be treated as an epidemic, and it requires a very strong response from the government.

In relation to the challenges of terrorism, I have spoken in this house about the social cohesion and resilience fund, for which the government has set aside \$25 million in the multicultural affairs portfolio. It has failed to deliver on any short-term priorities to minimise the risk of radicalisation and respond more effectively to the challenges of terrorism. This is something multicultural communities, in particular Islamic communities, would welcome. There are lots of initiatives on the ground that are ready to roll. I have called for these to be rolled out, and a year later we are still waiting.

Mr O'Donohue's motion refers to the wasting of money. There was the \$860 million of Victorian taxpayers money squandered by this government through its refusal to build the east-west link. That money could have been used to fund critical projects

and programs, including police resources. Instead we saw that money go up in smoke, along with \$20 million spent on the new logo. As a former secondary school teacher, I must say the new logo could have been a class exercise at year 8 or year 9 level, and I reckon we might have had a better outcome. I cannot for the life of me see how it cost \$20 million.

I would like to focus very briefly on the failure of Labor to invest in more police. This stands in stark contrast to the coalition's record. We added 1900 additional police and 950 PSOs during our term in office. Given that stark contrast, it is not surprising that there have been significant increases in crime across the south-east. I have moved motions about that and will certainly take other opportunities to pursue it. Crime is the single biggest concern for families across the south-east, followed by the cost of living, the cost of housing and the need for infrastructure.

With those few words, I take pleasure in supporting this motion. I note that the Minister for Police has been very — —

Mr Finn — He is useless. He is fair dinkum useless.

Mrs PEULICH — There has been criticism of him, Mr Finn. There have been very few runs on the board. Therefore I am very pleased to support Mr O'Donohue's motion.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak on the motion moved by Mr O'Donohue regarding police numbers:

That this house notes:

- (1) in November 2014, when the coalition left government there were 13 151 equivalent full-time sworn police officers in Victoria;
- (2) as at the end of June 2015 there were 13 151 equivalent full-time sworn police officers in Victoria;
- (3) the failure of the Andrews Labor government to add even one additional sworn police member despite population growth of approximately 100 000 per annum and the challenges of terrorism, ice and family violence;
- (4) that while the Premier, Daniel Andrews, MP has not prioritised additional police, he has found hundreds of millions of dollars to not build a road —

almost \$1 billion —

and \$20 million for a new logo —

for Victoria —

and

- (5) the failure of Labor to invest in more police stands in stark contrast to the coalition's record of 1900 additional

police and 950 protective services officers during its term in office.

I will deal with that straightaway. We added 1900 more police and 950 protective services officers (PSOs) and Victoria felt safer. Victoria does not feel safe now.

Mr Finn — No, it doesn't.

Mr ONDARCHIE — It does not feel safe. It seems that out on the beat there are a lot fewer than 13 151 police. The former government committed to PSOs at every railway station. This government then said, 'We're going to trial our Homesafe program', a 24-hour public transport program, but it failed to recognise that PSOs would be needed on those railway stations; there are only a select few stations that have PSOs on them. The government has changed the name of the Homesafe program to the Night Network, maybe because it feels Victorians will not be able to get home safely.

There has been a significant increase in family violence and child welfare problems and there just do not seem to be enough police on the beat. There is more hooning, and the two-up policy is reducing the ability of police to catch them. The government has done away with police chases, and ice and other drugs are affecting communities right across Victoria. As I visit regional Victoria particularly I hear shocking stories about the effects of ice, and it seems that the Melbourne-centric Premier, Daniel Andrews, does not care. Outlaw motorcycle gangs are still active in Victoria and there are not enough cops on the beat to deal with them.

Terrorism is always a threat, and we have seen some changes around this building to security in relation to any threat of terrorism. Crime rates are up in Victoria, but Daniel Andrews does not care. There are also other criminal activities happening in Victoria. We are learning more about things like union corruption, and it is interesting that the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption has highlighted elements of union corruption. The Premier has heard the messages loud and clear about trade union corruption, but he does not want to know. Even within his own little friendship group he has heard the message, but he does not want to act. He does not want to act for the safety of Victorians. He does not want to deal with crime and reinstate law and order to this state.

But he does have \$1 billion to not build new infrastructure. He has money — \$20 million — to build a new logo for Victoria that is an upside-down triangle. Quite frankly I could have done it on Microsoft Word for a quarter of the price, but the Premier has rolled it out as his biggest achievement in 12 months in

Victoria. In my business experience chief executives who paint the walls or create a new logo have no plan for their organisation. That is what we are seeing in Daniel Andrews, and that is why I support Mr O'Donohue's motion today. It is about the safety of Victorians to go about their lawful business knowing they will be well covered, but they are not because the Premier does not care.

The police have adopted a two-up policy, which means they go around in pairs for their own safety. I understand why operationally they might need to do that. The government has adopted the same principle for protective services officers, even those who operate in this building. Even here they do 10 minutes in this place and 10 minutes in the Legislative Assembly. For half the day PSOs are not in the Legislative Council.

What is Daniel Andrews doing about restoring law and order to this state and about promoting Victorians safety? Nothing. In noting that, we must also understand that there is lots of pressure on our police members. As crime rates go up and the government turns its back on safety in Victoria and on the ability of people to go about their lawful business in peace and harmony, there is pressure on police. We look to the police force but its members have more responsibility and more people to deal with, and they are under pressure. As human beings they suffer from that pressure. As human beings they must deal with the workplace stress that besets them each day they go to work.

Even today as we sit in this house a policeman undertaking his duty in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne has been struck by a car trying to get away. We wish that police member all the best. Our thoughts and prayers are with the medical staff who are dealing with that police member and the emergency services who are assisting him and his colleagues, friends and family.

All this adds to the stress of our wonderful police members. I know how this goes. They have various coping mechanisms. The days of the night shift barbies are gone, and the days of the police club down near the old Prince Henry's Hospital are gone. The challenges for the police are getting greater and greater each day. As Victorians we look to our government to support our police members, and they are getting none. They are getting no support from this government. Perhaps that is because the police union is not as strong as it could be, because we know Daniel Andrews takes his instructions from the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, as Mr Finn correctly interjects, provides instructions to Daniel Andrews. It is interesting to note that the United Firefighters Union — the pre-poll friend of the Labor Party — has suddenly lost faith in Daniel Andrews. But Daniel Andrews does not care about emergency services, he does not care about our police people, he does not care about the citizens of Victoria in terms of their safety.

There is no greater example of that than in my own electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region, an electorate where I know Ms Patten is active in ensuring safety for our constituents. But what has happened? The 24-hour police station in Craigieburn, one of the fastest growing areas of metropolitan Melbourne, is closed.

Mr Finn — And you need a police station in Craigieburn.

Mr ONDARCHIE — You do. The 24-hour police station in Grimshaw Street, Greensborough, cannot operate 24 hours a day. The police station on High Street, Epping, has great members working there, including my good friend Senior Sergeant Paul Mellick, who is doing a great job, but they are under pressure from police numbers and the station does not have enough resources. They cannot run a 24-hour station because there are not enough police. In Reservoir the police station that should operate 24 hours a day does not have enough members to be open 24 hours a day.

You might recall Reservoir as the place where the big railway junction is, that the government promised to fix. It promised to change the level crossing, with advertising about it everywhere. The member for Preston in the Assembly, Robin Scott, still has posters up which say, 'Labor is going to change the level crossing in Reservoir', but it is not on the agenda. In Craigieburn, Greensborough, Epping and Reservoir, the 24-hour police stations the community needs now cannot operate 24 hours a day because there are not enough police members in one of the fastest growing areas of metropolitan Melbourne — but wait, there is more.

Mr Ramsay — Not too much more.

Mr ONDARCHIE — There is a lot more! On 18 August 2014 the then shadow minister for police, Wade Noonan — now the minister — and the member for Yan Yean in the Assembly, Danielle Green, delivered to the community the news that, 'Only Labor will build Mernda police station'.

Mr O'Donohue — That is a relief. Is it open?

Mr ONDARCHIE — I will pick up on Mr O'Donohue's interjection of, 'Is it open?', in just one moment — hold the phone. On 18 August 2014 Mr Noonan said:

Only Labor will build a new police station in Mernda, because the safety of growing communities is so important.

His colleague Ms Green, the member for Yan Yean in the Assembly, went on to say:

Labor believes that communities are safest when police are on the beat, and that's what we'll deliver in Mernda.

To pick up on Mr O'Donohue's interjection, here we are almost 12 months into the term of a government that said, 'We will not waste a day' and I put to my colleagues the question: how many square centimetres of dirt have been turned in order to build the Mernda police station? Less than one — zero. Nothing has been done by those people who said that they care about these growing communities. They care about the people of Mernda, they care about the people of Northern Metropolitan Region. The South Morang postcode is one of the fastest growing areas in the country, and what is the government doing for those people? Nothing. It is just talk.

Twenty-four-hour police stations have gone in Craigieburn, Greensborough, Epping, Reservoir and Mernda — the one that has not been started — and do you know why? Because Labor says it is Labor heartland and it does not have to care about it. It says, 'We don't care about it because they'll vote for us anyway'. I can tell you now, to quote the words of Bob Dylan, 'The times they are a-changin'', because the people of Northern Metropolitan Region who have been disregarded by Labor for time immemorial are saying, 'Enough is enough'.

Mr O'Donohue's motion today sums it all up. Not to be unfair to Mr O'Donohue, but this is quite a wordy motion. I could put it another way: Daniel Andrews does not care about Victorians full stop. A billion dollars not to build infrastructure, \$20 million on a new logo, Labor rorts, Labor infighting, dumping a minister and a deficit budget within the first 12 months of a government for the first time in 20 years. This is what Victoria has had to deal with since 29 November 2014. Labor promised so much but has delivered so little.

This is what we are getting with Daniel Andrews. He does not care about Victorians. He only cares about himself and his Labor mates, particularly the one who has been accused of rorts by the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption. What has Daniel Andrews done about that in terms of

restoring law and order and faith in Victoria? Nothing. We have had enough, and not just we the opposition but we the people of Victoria. I guess when they settle into their beds at home tonight the people of Victoria will be happy in the knowledge that \$20 million of their money has been spent on Daniel Andrews's new logo. I commend this motion to the house.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak on this motion so ably moved by Mr O'Donohue. Mr Ondarchie was quick to paraphrase Daniel Andrews, so I will paraphrase Mr O'Donohue, because what this motion says is that O'Donohue cares. That is something that everybody who is concerned about law and order in this state, whether they are on the job or they are people in their homes concerned about their welfare, really needs to take into consideration, because we have a situation in this state where we have a government that does not care about Victoria Police. We have a government that does not particularly care about law and order. In fact over many years Labor members have shown time and time again that they are contemptuous of our law enforcement officers. They are contemptuous of authority, and that is because the people who are pulling their strings evidently are people who do not necessarily follow the law as most of us do.

It has been my view for a very long time, and I have said so in this house over a number of years, that there are two very important things that Victoria Police needs to do its job properly. It needs to be properly resourced, and, perhaps just as importantly, it needs the authority of the government of the day to do its job. The matter of resources is something that is often debated, and certainly out in my neck of the woods in the western suburbs the police are very much under-resourced.

I think of the struggle that the officers at Sunshine, for example, put up with every day with numbers that are so far below what they need to do their job in the way they would like to that it is just not funny. I think of the struggle that we have had over what seems to be decades to get the appropriate number of police officers in Werribee. I am sure Mr O'Donohue would be aware of the difficulties and the struggle that the people of Werribee have had to get the police numbers they need. We know there is no way that Labor will ever properly resource Victoria Police. That is a given.

Perhaps what is worse is that Labor will never give the police force the moral authority it needs to do its job. Labor members are constantly undermining the police force. They constantly undermine law and order in this state. We have seen it over many years, and it comes down to one thing — that is, that the political left hates the police. That is the bottom line. We have seen some

of the more extreme elements of the political left, including trade unionists — John Setka and his crew — belting police on the streets.

Mr Ondarchie — And the horses.

Mr FINN — And the horses as well indeed; that was appalling. We have seen these people treating police with total and absolute contempt. We have seen them spitting on police, we have seen them kicking police and we have seen them punching police. These are the people who are behind the Labor government. These are the people who are behind the scenes, pulling the strings. These are the people who are in the backrooms, telling the Premier, Daniel Andrews, and the Minister for Police, Wade Noonan, what to do, what to say and how to think. It should not come as any surprise at all to realise that Labor has no respect for our police force. That is almost a truism these days — a very sad truism, but a truism nonetheless.

That is not to say that come election time ALP members will not use the police force and the police union if they can in order to try to portray themselves as something they are not. They will try to pretend and tell the electorate that they are very much on the side of the police. We saw that at the last state election when the ALP had a police officer or somebody pretending to be a police officer on its how-to-vote card. It did not matter that Labor does not actually care about law and order. It does not matter as far as its members are concerned. They do not actually care about the police, but they will use the police wherever and whenever they possibly can. That was just another example of how Labor members regard the police as dirt beneath their feet.

This is another example of the way the Labor Party is only too happy to politicise the police force and use the Victoria Police for its own political ends. That is something that, I think, is beneath contempt. I have absolute and total respect for Victoria Police.

I say, 'Thank God we have such great men and women out on the beat every day protecting us', and I fear to think where we would be and what would happen to us without them. But what do Labor members do? They will use them, but they will never give them the respect they deserve.

We just have to go back a few years to the early days of the Brumby government when it appointed a new chief commissioner. It is interesting: the first thing a Labor government does, generally speaking, is to get rid of the Chief Commissioner of Police. That is something that happens.

Mr Ondarchie — Ken Lay.

Mr FINN — Ken Lay is another example. You are exactly right. But going back to the late 1990s we had an individual appointed as chief commissioner who had absolutely no respect for Victoria Police at all. In fact she said in her opening press conference as chief commissioner that as far as she was concerned Victoria Police was as corrupt as the police force she had come from in New South Wales. I have said this before but it is worth repeating: that is one of the most despicable comments that I have ever heard from a Chief Commissioner of Police — to attack her own members in that way was a disgrace. As we saw, following on from that appointment, the fabric of Victoria Police was destroyed by that chief commissioner. That chief commissioner was somebody who did not have the best interests of law and order or the Victoria Police at heart. I think everybody now knows that and everybody now accepts that. Although when I first raised my complaints about Christine Nixon in this house there was outrage from members of the then Brumby government, there is nobody on that side of the house today defending Christine Nixon at all, because they know that I was right. They know the damage that Christine Nixon did to the Victorian police force because she was put there to do a job, and did she do a job on Victoria Police!

Sadly it will be some years, in my view, before Victoria Police recovers from the damage that she did. But again, it was a classic example of the Labor Party using Victoria Police for its own political purposes. The police should be above politics. The police, as far as I am concerned, should be revered; they should be respected. The police are people we depend on as a society. As a community we depend on them every day, every night. They are out there putting themselves on the line, putting their lives on the line to protect us. They deserve better than to be treated as political pawns by the ALP, but that is what happens, and I suppose that is something we almost just have to come to accept. We know that the Victorian police force under Labor is grossly under-resourced, and I cannot help but think — —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr FINN — Yes, Mr Ramsay, I will finish shortly. I cannot help but think what that \$857 million that we know of that has gone down the S-bend as a result of Labor scrapping the east–west link would do for the resources of Victoria Police. That would give Werribee every police officer that it ever wanted or ever needed. It would look after the people in Sunshine. It would look after the people across the western suburbs, and even Mernda might get a police station.

Mr Ondarchie — You think?

Mr FINN — With \$857 million I reckon even Mernda might get a police station, and I wish the people of Mernda well as things stand at the minute though. They are certainly going to need it.

I commend Mr O'Donohue for the fact that he has brought this motion before the house, because I believe law and order is one of the most important issues in this state, indeed in this country. Without law and order there is probably not much else that we can do. If society is breaking down around us, if criminality is running rampant, it does not matter how good the schools are, because nobody is safe. It does not matter how good the hospitals are, because nobody is safe. Law and order is the very foundation of our society and Victoria Police members hold that foundation together. They hold the foundation together and without them we would be in a great deal of strife.

I once again commend Mr O'Donohue for bringing this motion before the house, and I urge the house to support it. I am hoping, perhaps hoping beyond hope, that the Andrews Labor government might actually do something to show some support for a group in our society that is fully deserving of that support and indeed is very much needing that support. At the moment there is no respect from this government for our police force. There is no respect from the political left for our police force, and that is something that everybody in this house knows. I am very hopeful that when this government leaves office in November 2018, which is only three years away, it will not have caused enough damage to the Victorian police force or to law and order in this state for us to fix up the damage that has been caused.

Ms Mikakos — On a point of order, Acting President, I understand Mr Finn asserted that members of the government were not prepared to defend their position in relation to this debate. I think it is important that members note that there was in fact an agreement reached between the parties that government members would not speak given the Remembrance Day events earlier today and the fact that we did have less time allocated for opposition business today. I just want to put on record and make it clear — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! It is a point of clarification, but it is not a point of order.

Ms Mikakos — I just want to make it clear, in response to Mr Finn's assertions — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! Thank you, Minister!

Mr Finn — On the point of order, Acting President, if Ms Mikakos had been on time to take her spot when she should have been, she would have heard me not talk about the government being here to defend this motion; what I said was that the government will not defend Christine Nixon anymore. I did not say anything about the motion at all or the government's position. She should get her facts straight before she opens her yap!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! I have already declared it is not a point of order and it is not debatable, so that is the end of it.

Mrs Peulich — On a further point of order, Acting President, Ms Mikakos asserted that Mr Finn had misled the house. That is reflecting on a member, it is against standing orders and I ask that she withdraw that.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! In my view I do not believe Ms Mikakos has gone that far, but I am happy to check *Hansard*. If that is the case, I will deal with it later.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion moved by Mr O'Donohue. When I was back in the force in the year 2000 there were about 11 000 police for the state of Victoria — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, Acting President, which goes to the contribution Mr Bourman is about to make, I am trying to listen to what is going to be a very important contribution from Mr Bourman but Ms Mikakos keeps interjecting across the chamber. I ask you to ask her to desist so we can listen to Mr Bourman's important contribution.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! Again, that is not a point of order. Mr Bourman to continue.

Mr BOURMAN — As I was saying, back in the year 2000 there were approximately 11 000 police officers for this state. Fifteen years on, there are 13 151. That is not a large increase given the increase in the number of people residing in the state. There has also been an increase in violence-related offences, family violence being just part of that. Generally it seems that a lot more people are taking out their frustrations on

other people in a violent manner. We have had protective services officers introduced, who have been great at railway stations and they are fantastic in Parliament House, but that still does not help with the general issues the police face.

With the amount of work police do and the nature of that work, post-traumatic stress disorder is a big problem, and what that does is reduce police numbers due to people being sick. Sometimes, depending on the nature of it, it can be for weeks or months, and it has been known to be years — and that is on top of other workplace injuries. I know of some rural stations running a combined van through areas that would probably be the best part of 100 kilometres. You can only imagine the response times the public is going to be getting if something happens whilst the van is at one end of the region. It is going to take them 15 or 20 minutes at best to get to the other end.

The heightened terrorism threat means more work for police officers. Not all sworn police officers are initial responders, and not all of them work the vans or do the traffic cars. There are a lot of sworn officers in intelligence positions and in other positions where they would not have been, say, 10 years ago or 15 years ago. In conjunction with that, now everyone is supposed to be working two-up. That was the case with the original divvy vans and it is still the case with divvy vans, but that does not cover other functions such as traffic, where officers generally used to work one-up. Now that is just not possible.

Then we have the rise of the ice issue. Ice may be a new phenomenon, but the misuse of drugs has been and probably will always be there. All it takes is resources that would otherwise be dealing with other issues. The misuse of drugs can lead to violence and theft, and again all that takes is numbers. More people, more problems need more police. Working smarter, not harder, is not really the answer in a lot of cases. A lot of what the police do is mandated by courts, legislation and policy. I remember that if we caught a criminal for a fairly simple theft, it would mean hours off the road. Now if we add that to just the general strain — and I know things have got more complicated — it just leads to more strain.

The increase from 11 000 to 13 000 is not large. Higher numbers of police on the roads is going to help because it will mean that the police face less stress. They cannot change the nature of what they do, but they can change how much they have to do. It will reduce claims and reduce sick leave, which is another overhead that the government has to deal with, but also, and most

importantly, it will improve service to the community, which is, after all, what the police are there for.

I am going to wind up with my thoughts on the officer who was hurt during the operation on EastLink today. That is just a risk you face. Every time you put the uniform on and go out for a routine sheriff's operation, of which I did a couple myself, it can all turn — just like that. I commend the motion to the house and will leave it at that.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — My contribution will be short, but today I think it is very important that I highlight some great work that people are doing in the electorate of Eastern Victoria Region and also support Mr O'Donohue's motion, which highlights the failure of Labor to invest more in police numbers despite the very real and ever-present increased challenges that the police face. In my role over the last six months as a member for Eastern Victoria Region I have visited a number of police stations in Gippsland, sometimes in the company of Mr O'Donohue — and I thank him for his company. I have visited Moe, Sale, Morwell, Warragul, Korumburra and Leongatha, and I have witnessed the great job our policemen and women do on a continual basis.

At Morwell I talked to Senior Sergeant Howard Jones, who had high praise for another member in his ranks — Indigenous community liaison, Laurie Marks. Laurie Marks has worked for many years to support the Indigenous community and be a positive conduit between that community and the police, with fantastic results. At Morwell I also learnt from talking to the sexual assault team how the sexual offences and child abuse investigation team, comprising experienced and qualified detectives, along with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centres Against Sexual Assault work effectively and respond cohesively to cases of family violence and sexual abuse. Operating very cohesively, they have now greatly reduced response times and tailored their reactions so that their response time to call-outs for family abuse issues have been greatly reduced, which benefits both the families and the victims themselves.

At Warragul I talked to Inspector Chris Major, who spoke of how the members often become intrinsically involved in their communities through coaching, sporting teams, men's shed activities and Indigenous smoking ceremonies to break down barriers and create positive relationships. Acting Sergeant Dale McCahan at Leongatha station spoke about regularly attending schools and youth forums to build positive relationships and trust with our young people. While attending a forum on ice in Gippsland a couple of months ago I

spoke to Brad Dixon. I identified that he really goes above and beyond the call of duty on many occasions to work with people, again to create positive relationships with families dealing with members who are taking ice and to establish intervention activities to try to prevent these vulnerable people from taking up this insidious habit.

As is stated in Mr O'Donohue's motion, in its four-year term the coalition delivered an extra 1900 police and more than 950 protective services officers. While attending the service at the Shrine of Remembrance for Remembrance Day today, I witnessed firsthand the great job that the protective services officers were doing, just being a positive and gentle directional force for us and making us feel secure. I thank them for their services.

Before the election the coalition committed to boosting police numbers with 250 frontline police and 50 new protective services officers. Our five-year plan by which we were going to put together a package of \$387.8 million included outsourcing police cell management to allow 450 current officers to move back onto the beat and recruiting 250 officers into new specialist positions to tackle online crime and fraud, counterterrorism and forensics. Online crime has developed and just blown out in the past 10 to 20 years.

By contrast, we have seen no additional police from Labor. Despite the Andrews government promising 400 custody officers to relieve some of the pressure, we are yet to see any of them materialise. Unfortunately my electorate has not been listed as a region for initial deployment of these officers, and I am concerned that it may be quite some time before we see them in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley, if at all. I hope this is not the case.

The need for extra police in my electorate has also been highlighted by the new \$16.3 million Somerville police station, which is now operational. I understand that this new station is not operating a front counter service due to police resources being needed for patrolling Somerville and surrounding areas. So despite there being this brand-new \$16.3 million police station, if you need a face-to-face encounter with or assistance from your police, you will need to travel to Mornington or Hastings, which seems rather ridiculous. Quite understandably, I believe the local community is not happy with this new station not being open to the public.

I understand that the decision on resourcing at the station is made by the Chief Commissioner of Police and police command, but they can only work with what

they have. If the government is not prepared to fund more police numbers, it puts police command in a very difficult position. As I mentioned before, from speaking with our local police it is evident they are having to deal with some significant challenges in tackling the use of this terrible drug of ice and family violence — and sometimes they go hand in hand. Police in my electorate and in many other regional communities are having to face this never-before-seen combination.

My concern is also that the workload of our police is increasing, yet the resourcing of our police by the government is not. Today we have heard that in its first 11 months in office the Andrews government has failed to provide any additional police for our local communities. In a hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in May this year, the Minister for Police, Mr Wade Noonan, stated:

From a government policy point of view and from a budget point of view, we will use our future budgets to try to deliver Victoria Police in whatever way we can the sorts of resources that will make their job easier and, clearly by extension, make the community safer.

These are fine and noble words, but my comment is: Mr Noonan, you can try to do it or you can just do it. I commend this motion to the house.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I thank Ms Symes, Mr Ramsay, Mrs Peulich, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, Ms Bath, Mr Finn and Mr Bourman in particular as a former member of Victoria Police for their contributions to the debate on the motion. Since I moved this motion and the debate commenced several weeks ago, we have had a number of very disturbing revelations that provide further evidence of the need for additional Victoria Police resources.

Before I get to those points, I want to highlight the comments Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Bourman made about some of the challenges Victoria Police members face with regard to mental health and the ever-growing demands and challenges of the job. I commend the chief commissioner and the secretary of the Police Association Victoria on the work they are doing in this space. I call on the minister and the government to do more in this space to assist the hardworking men and women of Victoria Police, who view some terrible things. They have to confront and resolve horrible situations in the interests of the community and of those they are seeking to protect. Those situations, those things they see and those problems they have to confront can create issues for them. We need to provide them with the response and assistance they require.

It is interesting that only one government member spoke on this motion. Ms Symes spoke briefly. She said that under the coalition the crime rate was up. Interestingly, under Labor the crime rate is up. Crime Statistics Agency figures show that the offence rate between June 2014 and June 2015 — the majority of which time was under Labor — was up 2.6 per cent and the number of offences committed during that period was up 4.6 per cent.

Let us be crystal clear about this: under the Labor government crime is up by any measure. The number of offences in a gross sense is up 4.6 per cent and the offence rate on a population basis is also up 2.6 per cent.

Ms Symes also talked about police custody officers. I have had numerous responses from the ministers talking about how wonderful it is that Labor is delivering custody officers.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Let me take up Mr Ondarchie's interjection. He asked how many have been delivered. Nearly 12 months into government, we do not have a single custody officer. In fact the legislation is yet to pass this house. We are 12 months in, and when it comes to Labor's top priority of additional police resources there is not a single custody officer trained, training has not begun, the legislation has not passed the Parliament and there is no timetable for the full rollout of the 400. There has been no benefit, no relief for police guarding prisoners in police cells — no custody officers — because Daniel Andrews has failed to deliver even one.

It is shameful, and it is a disgrace that at a time when ice, family violence, terrorism, population growth and a range of other issues are making the job of Victoria Police ever more complex. They have been provided with no extra personnel — no extra sworn members to do all of those difficult tasks. Mr Ondarchie, in his contribution, talked about some of the challenges in the growth corridor — and Labor only committed to one new police station prior to the election. Here we are a year on and there is nothing. We have no timetable for when the project will be delivered, where it is going to be or when it will be opened. Labor has had a year to act on this important issue, and we have seen absolutely nothing.

Since we spoke last time there have been very concerning revelations about a number of 24-hour police stations across metropolitan Melbourne that are so short-staffed they cannot even keep their doors open. They include police stations at Craigieburn, at Epping,

at Reservoir, at Greensborough and last week at Pakenham. I noticed that on the Pakenham *Gazette* Facebook page there have been comments from a Mr Major, who said he had been to the Pakenham police station on several occasions seeking police assistance and the door was closed and there was no intercom to access that assistance.

It is clear that because of a lack of focus and the waste of \$1 billion on not building the east–west link and a waste of money on a range of other projects —

Ms Pennicuik interjected.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Ms Pennicuik said, 'What's that got to do with police numbers?'. For the benefit of the Greens, money does not grow on trees. Money has got to come from somewhere, and when you waste \$1 billion on not building the east–west link or you waste \$20 million on a new logo, that is \$1 billion or \$20 million you do not have to build a new police station in Mr Ondarchie's electorate. That is \$1 billion or \$20 million you do not have to provide police at the brand-new Somerville police station — the \$16 million police station the coalition procured, funded and delivered that is closed to the public.

What an absolute disgrace! We have the first Minister for Police, I expect, in the history of Victoria to have a new police station that has actually been closed. It was built and designed to be open to the public — it has a front counter there. It is a beautiful building, and it is closed to the public. If there is an emergency, police have to come from Hastings or from Frankston or elsewhere. It is an absolute disgrace.

As I mentioned briefly, and I will close on this point, the former member for Burwood failed to keep the Ashburton police station open. Under the Brumby Labor government, the hours at the Ashburton police station were slashed. Under the coalition, thanks to a \$500 000 investment in infrastructure upgrades overseen by a former Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Kim Wells, and thanks to the advocacy and hard work of the member for Burwood, Graham Watt, coupled with the additional resources that the previous government provided to Victoria Police, Ashburton police station was reopened.

What have we seen in less than a year of Labor? Hours slashed. Does the community feel safe? We heard from Beryl, who lives down the street, on the weekend about how she felt much safer having the Ashburton police station open every day. Its opening hours are being slashed back to just two days a week.

We have under Daniel Andrews no new police and resources being wasted and not used to build infrastructure. We have police stations in critical

growth areas that are so stretched that they cannot even keep their doors open, we have new police stations being completed that are closed to the public and we have existing police stations that just had their hours increased in 2013 and that are now having their hours slashed. Meanwhile, Daniel Andrews and Wade Noonan talk about custody officers and all the wonderful things they say they are doing, but not one has been delivered. Training has not commenced, legislation has not passed the Parliament and not one has been delivered. It is an absolute disgrace. Labor has its priorities all wrong, and I commend the motion to the house.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 25

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

Noes, 13

Dalidakis, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Mulino, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Pulford, Ms
Herbert, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Symes, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Leane, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Tierney, Ms
Melhem, Mr	

Pairs

Lovell, Ms	Shing, Ms
------------	-----------

Motion agreed to.

LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Reference

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That pursuant to section 33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 this house requires the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 3 March 2017 on the effectiveness of laws and procedures relating to illicit and synthetic drugs and prescription medication, including —

- (1) reviewing the effectiveness of drug treatment programs in Victoria with recommendations on how treatment and harm minimisation strategies could be used as an alternative to criminal penalties;

- (2) reviewing the effectiveness of Victorian government investment into illicit drug supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction strategies and programs;
- (3) reviewing effectiveness of drug detection programs including roadside testing and procedures for deploying drug detection activities at events;
- (4) assessing the impact of prescription medication on road safety;
- (5) reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of laws and regulations relating to illicit and synthetic drugs; and
- (6) assessing practices of other Australian states and territories and overseas jurisdictions and their approach to drug law reform and how other positive reforms could be adopted to Victorian law.

I rise to speak today on my motion for an inquiry by the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee into the effectiveness of laws and procedures relating to illicit and synthetic drugs and prescription medication. I really believe this is an important and long-overdue inquiry that has been brought forward to the house. The issues surrounding drug laws have certainly been the core of my work for many years and are at the heart of the Australian Sex Party's policy platform.

In the early 1990s I was a volunteer on what was probably one of the first drug buses. It was not called a drug-testing bus; it was just a drug bus. We provided information about drugs, a needle and syringe exchange program, counselling and condoms, and a range of other information.

I suspect everyone here today would agree we have all been affected in some way by drugs, whether it is that our car has been broken into, that our insurance premiums have gone up or, like me, that we have lost family and friends to drugs. Fortunately sometimes this is only temporary, but it is sometimes tragically forever.

I am sure that many members will also agree, as do the people of Victoria, that the response to drugs must be structured in such a way that we do not cause further harm. Unfortunately, today the interventions deployed to counter the impact of drugs on our society often prove to be more harmful to society than the drugs themselves.

Reviewing our treatment programs to better understand the needs and to ensure that they are able to provide accessible and affordable treatment services to people struggling with dependence or other drug problems is critical — and this is what this inquiry is about. It is not about sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and I say to Mrs Peulich that it is not about legalising all drugs.

I want to acknowledge the excellent work done in last year's ice inquiry, particularly the work of Mr Ramsay. I am hopeful that he will see the work that I wish to undertake in this inquiry as complementing the in-depth and excellent research done in that very good inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines. That inquiry examined the current and recommended responses to the use of ice in Victoria, including the regulatory, health and criminal justice responses. It recommended a number of harm reduction programs as well as better facilities and access to withdrawal beds in regional areas. It made a range of recommendations about programs and legislative developments, and the committee's report represents a large-scale body of work on methamphetamines.

My inquiry will build on and continue the good work covered in that report. However, we cannot contain this issue to the single illicit substance of ice — not when drug law reform encompasses so many far-reaching areas and such broad demographics. We need to examine licit — legal — and illicit drug use, the impacts of the current criminal justice and health responses and the efficacy and impact of those current responses. This needs to be done for all drugs.

If we look at the past 12 months, we see that a large number of Victorians have used cannabis, a much smaller number have used ice and a large number of people have used new and emerging psychoactive substances, or legal highs as they are often called. Of course there is also prescription medication. And we should not forget heroin. Last week I went on a heroin tour of Richmond. It is still the drug of choice among many drug users in Victoria and certainly in the inner suburbs of Melbourne; it has not gone away. When those users cannot get heroin they will use whatever other drugs they can get, but heroin is still their preferred drug.

Many senior law enforcement officers and senior policy officers are now saying publicly that we cannot arrest our way out of the drug problem. In recent times this has been said by former Victorian police commissioner Ken Lay. Even yesterday the Victorian Minister for Police acknowledged this in a media release as well. We cannot just keep arresting our way out of this drug problem. As Mr Bourman said in his contribution, we need to be smarter. We need to police smarter.

My first reference is to review the effectiveness of drug treatment programs in Victoria and make recommendations on how treatment and harm minimisation strategies could be used as an alternative to criminal penalties. This is number one on the list for a number of reasons. For starters, in Victoria we spend

hundreds of millions of dollars on drug law enforcement. Our courts are full of people who are either on drug use charges or other drug-related charges. Our prisons are overflowing with the same people. We need to look at how we can better manage and support these citizens. Most have a sad childhood history that has led them to this very sad place.

Arresting and charging people with possession and use of drugs, particularly young people, can cause untold damage to their future opportunities to work and travel. Prisons are the most costly and least effective response to drug use. However, there are considerable benefits associated with the diversion of offenders into community residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation services instead of incarceration. The costs of treatment are substantially cheaper for these services — much cheaper than prison. They also have outcomes such as lower recidivism rates and better health outcomes and thus, overall, provide savings to our health system. In addition the treatment of offenders in the community rather than in prison is associated with fewer deaths and better health-related quality of life.

One of the 54 recommendations from the methamphetamine inquiry was that the government should conduct further work to examine whether drug courts could be established in broader areas, such as Dandenong and other areas around the state. I hope this inquiry will pay particular attention to this area.

Unfortunately each year we are spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on drug issues, but only 20 per cent is being used on drug treatments and less than 2 per cent is being used on harm reduction measures. Drug treatment remains seriously underfunded, with the huge unmet demand reflected in the long waiting lists encountered by far too many people seeking treatment, particularly in regional areas. Not everyone who takes drugs has a problem, but if you are telling people they have to wait for a long time to receive treatment, then they really do have a problem.

The second reference to the committee is to review the effectiveness of the Victorian government's investment in illicit drug supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction strategies and programs. It is estimated that police and customs seize about 10 per cent of the drugs coming into the country. We need to investigate the impact of these seizures. Are they making a difference? How are they making a difference? How are they affecting the reduction in drug supply in this country? Are they reducing the demand for drugs in this country? How effective are our drug education programs in schools in reducing the demand for drugs? Are we seeing changes in first user experiences? We all

know that the older a person is when they first use drugs, the less likely they are to go on to become a problematic drug user. What are the success rates of our detox and other treatment programs? Which ones are working? For example, methadone is found to be successful in a lot of cases, but it is still difficult and expensive to obtain for many people.

The third reference is a review of the effectiveness of drug detection programs, including roadside testing and procedures for deploying drug detection activities at events. I think it would be safe to say that there is agreement on the need to further reduce deaths, severe injuries and the economic cost of road accidents and trauma. However, the roadside drug testing regime introduced in Victoria only tests for three drugs, while other drugs — which some may argue probably carry a higher risk of causing accidents, such as short-acting benzodiazepines and pain-relieving opiates — are not tested for, nor are many of the new and emerging psychoactive substances.

Unlike alcohol roadside testing, where we have clear evidence and research supporting the detection of alcohol levels and its associated impairment on driving, there is no evidence that the presence of detectable quantities of the three drugs being tested for is sufficient to impair driving ability and increase the risk of road accidents. For example, if someone smoked a joint a few days ago, they would still have it in their system several days later. It would still be picked up by roadside drug testing, but they would not be impaired to drive.

Arguably we do not pick up a lot of prescription medication that would impair your ability to drive. Accordingly, I would like to see research into the obvious benefits of roadside drug testing. I am not disputing its benefits, but let us look at the costs. Let us look at how we can improve that service, particularly as this government has planned to substantially expand its rollout with 15 new roadside drug-testing buses. We also need to understand the unintended negative consequences that can occur as a result of this, such as people choosing to take other drugs that will not be detected by roadside drug testing.

It is important to note the very welcome announcement of medicinal cannabis becoming a prescription drug in this state. Patients will now be able to get this very worthwhile and important therapeutic drug. But what are we going to do about them driving? Are they going to be banned from driving completely? It might be that they have extremely low levels of tetrahydrocannabinol and high levels of cannabidiol and they would not be impaired to drive. This needs to be investigated. We

allow people on prescription drugs to drive. Medicinal cannabis will be a prescription drug. We need to investigate this.

I also have concerns about some of the passive alert dogs. We have seen some very tragic outcomes where young people going to festivals have consumed drugs at very unsafe levels to avoid detection. I understand and have spoken to police about the benefits of detection dogs as part of a wider range of tools that are used, but I would like to investigate this further. I would like to understand both the positives and the negatives of this. We have certainly heard of some very tragic outcomes in which police dogs have been at the forefront.

The fourth reference deals with the impact of prescription medication on road safety. It is an issue that we have long overlooked, and we need to tackle. As I said earlier, it is clear to us all that taking prescription drugs may definitely impair your ability to drive. They do, but we do not test for it — in fact, we do not even criminalise it. I would like to see this looked at in more depth. If we did, one imagines that the headlines in the *Herald Sun* may be quite different. They may not be screaming ‘Drugged up drivers on ice’; they may be screaming ‘Drugged up drivers on prescription drugs’. I think that is something that is very worthwhile for this Parliament to examine.

Benzodiazepines alone account for 56 deaths a year in Victoria, and 17 per cent of all drug-related deaths are due to benzodiazepines. That is not even taking into account other prescription drugs. This is a serious issue, and we need to look at the regulated use but also the misuse of these drugs.

The fifth reference is to review and assess the effectiveness of laws and regulations relating to illicit and synthetic drugs. Assessing the current laws and regulations relating to the range of currently illicit and synthetic substances is an area that, without question, poses one of the biggest challenges to the current policy approach. The effectiveness of our prohibition laws are incredibly challenged by the new and emerging psychoactive substances, not just here but around the world. Governments around the world and parliaments around the world are working out how they can deal with new psychoactive substances that are coming out. According to bodies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, two new substances are being identified each week.

Our drug laws are not going to be able to deal with such an onslaught of drugs. Our current drug laws also have the perverse effect of encouraging this proliferation of new drugs. Many of these new drugs seek to mimic the

effects of currently prohibited drugs, which some strongly suggest are actually safer than the chemical copies that have become more available and widespread. In the last 10 years in Victoria we have probably seen close to 300 new formulas of synthetic drugs enter the market. They have been banned and new ones have come on board, and they have been banned and new ones have come on board.

This chasing down and banning of the latest drug has led to this escalation of drugs. It has led to the fact that 300 new, untested psychoactive substances have come onto the market. We are starting to see backyard chemists mixing up and making their own concoctions in very dangerous ways. They are doing this to outdo us, the legislators, to beat us at our game of catching up with them. It is a bit like a police car chase going through the suburbs: at some point you have to stop that car chase and say, ‘Enough. We are endangering too many people if we continue this car chase. We are going to have to look at a smarter way of dealing with this’. We need a smarter way of policing, a smarter way of stopping organised crime and a smarter way of stopping the harm that these drugs can do to our society.

We need to look at what other states and territories are doing, and that is the final term of reference for this inquiry. We need to look at what other states and territories and overseas jurisdictions are doing with their laws and regulations. Let us learn from the positive and negative experiences elsewhere. There is nothing wrong with recycling a good idea — if it is a good idea, why reinvent the wheel? There is a problem with doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

I have spoken to police, I have spoken to drug manufacturers, I have spoken to drug users, I have spoken to drug dealers and I have spoken to drug experts, drug counsellors, doctors and even a few members of Parliament, who all resoundingly agree that we could do better in reducing the absolutely devastating effect that drug abuse has on our society. I ask that members support this inquiry and ensure that Victoria has drug policies that are evidence based, sensible and humane, and of course do no harm.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak on Ms Patten’s motion today in relation to a drugs, law enforcement and treatment inquiry. The motion seeks specifically that the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee inquire into, consider and report on the effectiveness of laws and procedures relating to illicit and synthetic drugs and prescription medication.

This is a motion that can only add to the depth of knowledge we know we need to have to better understand, and therefore better respond to, the complex issue of drug use and drug addiction, as well as the impact of our responses on individuals, families and communities. The Andrews Labor government acknowledged before the last election the increased prevalence in particular of the drug ice and the destructive force it was becoming, particularly in regional Victoria.

In my own electorate of Northern Victoria Region, we have seen a number of high-profile cases that have documented the tragic downfall of talented young people, full of potential, whose lives have been ripped apart, as have those of their parents, siblings and, in some cases, their children.

It is an area of government and public policy where we have been active. We have stood up, and we are saying, 'We have to do better; we must do better' — and we are committed to actually doing better. Through the Ice Action Plan, we are already investing \$45.5 million in new drug and booze buses; \$4.5 million to expand the Victoria Police forensics branch with eight new forensic scientists; \$18 million to expand drug treatment services focusing on rehabilitation for users in rural and regional areas; \$3.2 million to provide additional support for families affected by drug use; and \$1.5 million to provide drug education programs, enhancing the capacity of Victoria's needle and syringe program, strengthening and extending clinical and supervision training, and developing standard training modules to better equip frontline workers to deal with people who are affected by ice.

I know these initiatives are needed and wanted by desperate parents and families. I have spoken to quite a few people in my electorate and from my home town, and it is so prevalent. In country towns many years ago a lot of people did not know people who may have had drug problems, whereas now my parents know other parents whose children are struggling with this. I do not think there are many people left in small towns who do not know someone who has been impacted by ice. In that sense it is a real concern for communities because in the past heroin, for example, was 'that dirty drug' that not many people knew much about, whereas ice is coming through the front doors of country homes. It is horrible to see.

I am therefore very pleased that the Andrews government is committed to making an impact and helping those who are in the grip of this drug. As reported in the *Herald Sun* only yesterday, almost 1 in 10 drivers killed or injured on Victorian roads are

testing positive for ice — a deadly threat to other road users. The percentage of motorists on methamphetamines killed in crashes has almost doubled in the past 10 years, while the percentage of alcohol-related deaths over the same period has been in decline and has actually halved. The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine annual report shows that about 9 per cent of all injured drivers are testing positive for ice, so the figures are showing that 1 in 10 drivers injured or killed on our roads are testing positive for methamphetamines. That is pretty confronting and scary for anybody who uses the road.

Research indicates that a key factor when people are considering whether or not to drive after using drugs is a direct personal experience of being tested or knowing someone who may have been tested. Therefore it is great to see the commencement of Labor's election commitment relating to the testing of more drivers and the overhaul of Victoria's ageing booze bus fleet. Testing more drivers and having a highly visible enforcement activity such as prominent buses is crucial. I do not believe in police being covert about these things. If you want to have an impact, a deterrent impact is just as effective and will hopefully directly reduce drug-related road trauma.

This approach follows the rationale of the roadside alcohol screening program that has been responsible for a significant change in drink-driving behaviour. Some 200 000 drivers will be checked for drugs over the next two years under this program's expansion. The extra tests come as 700 highway patrol officers finish their training on how to administer the roadside drug tests that can be used in court.

The expansion also comes amid recent changes to Victoria's driving laws. Drivers who are caught with alcohol and illicit drugs in their system will now face a minimum 12-month licence cancellation and court fines of up to \$4550 for a first offence. Victoria Police will also be able to impound the vehicles of first-time offenders who record a blood alcohol concentration of 0.1 or higher. For repeat offenders convicted of drug and alcohol offences, the maximum fines will range from \$13 650 to \$40 959, depending on the blood alcohol level and previous offences. They will also receive a minimum two-year cancellation of their licence.

From 30 October it became mandatory for all drivers involved in serious crashes to submit to blood tests for drugs. These changes complement the government's road safety strategy, which aims to make Victorians safer by ensuring that there are safer drivers in safer vehicles on safer roads.

As the house will be aware, yesterday the government introduced a bill into the Legislative Assembly that aims to crack down on the manufacturers and peddlers of ice. It is without doubt the most worrying drug, and it is important to have a targeted response to this highly addictive substance. We also support a range of strategies to minimise harm related to alcohol and other drugs, including broad-based education and targeted campaigns, significant investment in youth drop-in centres and outreach for at-risk groups, and funding for key harm minimisation organisations. The needle and syringe program that is being expanded is an important part of trying to minimise the transmission of bloodborne disease.

We are also working in collaboration with our justice partners to deliver diversion programs. These include the sensible pre-charge cautioning programs, which provide an alternative to court proceedings for low-level offences; specialist courts and court support services and diversion programs; and treatment for convicted community and prison-based offenders to help them address their harmful alcohol and drug use where it relates to their offending behaviour.

We have also commissioned an independent review to look at the provision of adult alcohol and drug services, following the changes to service delivery introduced in 2014. We know there are lots of new approaches and treatments being trialled all the time, and it is important for Victoria to be at the forefront of innovative and effective programs. We will look to and continue to work closely with the commonwealth government, which has an important role to play in the areas of supply reduction, primary care and treatment access, and the regulation of drugs and poisons across Australia.

Of course ice is not the only troubling issue we face, with prescription drug abuse and alcohol-related deaths also soaring. As was reported in the *Age* earlier this year, the coroner's office has stated that 384 deaths were attributed to drugs and alcohol in 2014, up from 342 in 2010. The state's overall total overdose toll has risen for the fifth consecutive year and compares with the 2014 Victorian road toll. Prescription drugs were found to have been a factor in the deaths of more than 82 per cent of the 384 cases investigated by forensic pathologists. Illicit drugs were found to have contributed to 42 per cent of all overdoses, and alcohol was found to have contributed to nearly one in four deaths, although many of these deaths involved more than one substance.

We have a long history of vigilance and innovation in reducing our road toll over many years. The time has

come to take a similar approach to drugs. We know we do not have all the answers to these complex and difficult areas of policy. I am confident that there will always be a tension between those who believe that illicit drugs of any sort are evil and bad and that those who partake are the same and those who believe that proper regulation, use in moderation and educating users about the substances they take may be a safer and more appropriate approach to dealing with drugs in our society.

I am certainly supportive of continued dialogue in relation to drug reform, and I can confirm that the Andrews government believes that this motion can be but another important piece in the process of gathering intelligence and forming a better understanding of the intricacy and challenges we know exist around drug use and its consequences, which will ultimately inform better responses and better outcomes. Therefore we will support Ms Patten's motion before the house today.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise as the first speaker on behalf of the opposition in relation to Ms Patten's motion, and I congratulate her on bringing it before the house and putting this most important issue on the table.

I would like to start at the point where she started and congratulate Mr Ramsay on the excellent report he presented as chair of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, tabled in the last Parliament. The report Mr Ramsay tabled on behalf of the committee that he chaired contained approximately a year's worth of work — voluminous reports, extensive transcripts and complex, challenging recommendations to government and the broader community to deal with the ice issue, all of which informed and led to the previous government's ice action plan, a very detailed response to the issue of ice. The current government has its ice strategy.

Ms Patten's reference to Mr Ramsay's committee's report and the complexities associated with just one drug — methamphetamine — reinforces for me one of the issues with this motion. I will be up-front: the opposition will not be supporting the motion, and there are a number of reasons for that, which I will touch on. But foremost is the fact that this motion is very broad. It would be extremely challenging for any parliamentary committee to appropriately respond to the terms of reference. A parliamentary committee focusing on ice for a year and delivering a very complex report, which is complex for government to respond to, is very challenging. Ms Patten's referral motion touches on all elements of supply, demand and treatment, other jurisdictions, prescription medication, the legal

framework, regulations and synthetic drugs — the whole box and dice.

I congratulate Ms Patten for bringing this motion before the house, because these are indeed very complex and challenging issues. Ms Symes and Ms Patten in their contributions both mentioned the issue around prescription medication. That is an emerging and growing issue, and no doubt there is work to be done. But as a threshold proposition I think Ms Patten's motion is so broad that it would be very difficult for a committee to appropriately respond to it. The work of parliamentary committees is best done when the referral is targeted and specific, as it was in the inquiry chaired by Mr Ramsay.

I want to touch on an issue raised by Ms Symes in her contribution. This was something of a disappointment arising from the change of government. As part of the coalition government's response to ice, grants were opened. As part of the crime prevention portfolio a new funding stream was opened prior to the caretaker period — it was not an election commitment — and \$2 million was allocated. Communities were able to apply for grants of up to \$100 000 to respond to the ice issue. That was picking up a recommendation Mr Ramsay's committee made, drawing on experiences in Geelong and Mildura. I know the committee examined those two community-led responses in detail. Unfortunately that \$2 million was axed when Labor came to government and subsequently replaced with a much smaller pool of \$500 000. The \$100 000 maximum grant was significantly reduced to around \$10 000 or \$20 000, which does not enable the full community response a \$100 000 grant would. I make that observation about the breadth of the motion. These are important issues, but they are too broad for a parliamentary committee to examine as part of one inquiry.

I will also reflect on some of the comments made by Ms Patten in her contribution on the motion. She has been consistent in her views on many of these issues for a long period of time, and I respect that. But I think there is an underlying assertion in the motion, which was also implicit in Ms Patten's remarks upon moving it, that the current strong legislative and enforcement regime we have in Victoria is somehow inherently flawed and we need significant drug law reform. For many, drug law reform is seen as code for weakening our drug laws. I do not know if that is something we wish to undertake as a community. I think the broader community has an expectation that the drug problem will be tackled with a strong law enforcement response.

I am also concerned that the motion indirectly questions the validity of the random roadside drug testing regime in Victoria. The fact is that Victorian drivers are increasingly being detected under the influence of drugs, and road toll statistics for the past couple of years reveal that drivers under the influence of drugs are now killing themselves and others in higher numbers than those under the influence of alcohol. According to Victoria Police data, of the 242 people killed on our roads in 2013, 39 had cannabis, ecstasy or methamphetamines in their system, and 24 were killed and 121 injured by a driver who returned a positive drug test and was the driver of the offending vehicle. This means 26 per cent of all fatalities in 2013 involved drivers who tested positive for drugs, as compared with approximately 20 per cent who tested positive to a prohibited level of blood alcohol content.

Under the coalition the number of drug tests was increased to 100 000 a year. That has been continued by this government. I have had feedback from members of Victoria Police that the capacity to perform drug tests should be expanded beyond members of the traffic management unit to general members of Victoria Police. It has been reported to me that, especially in country towns, some known drug users understand that general police members do not have the ability to perform drug tests. Perhaps that is something the government could examine in conjunction with force command.

The opposition will not be supporting this motion. We have some concerns about its breadth, and we also have some concerns about what Ms Patten is seeking to achieve by it.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — The Greens will be supporting this motion, and we welcome it. Before I get to the formal part of my response I would like to talk about my personal experience. I live in Footscray, and 15 years ago Footscray was at the height of the street heroin dealing problem, to such a degree that you would walk through Footscray on any day and various dealers would occupy the footpath, dealing and chasing. Anyone walking through Footscray would be offered heroin. I remember going to a community meeting when the Bracks government was looking at the issue of supervised injecting rooms. At that stage I knew nothing about these issues, but what I did know was that people were scoring at the Footscray railway station, coming into my street and sometimes shooting up on my verandah. I was terrified of coming home one night and finding someone dead on my verandah. I kept thinking, 'This is someone's son, someone's daughter, someone's brother,

someone's sister. Someone loves this person, and they should not have to die this way'.

People will remember that at that time the *Herald Sun* was printing the heroin toll in the way it usually printed the road toll, and it rose in significant numbers.

Unfortunately courage was lost and we did not get a supervised injecting room in Footscray, but we did get Health Works, which has made a massive difference to the way local drug users are treated. It has also made a massive difference to the local community in terms of basic issues such as syringe litter in the streets, which is obviously one of the things that frightens people a great deal.

It was during that period that my eyes were really opened to the fact that we needed a different approach to drug use and drug treatment. I have never used party drugs, I have never smoked cannabis, I have never smoked tobacco and I barely drink, which makes me an excellent drugs spokesperson. But I have seen the damage done, and I have seen people's lives destroyed by drugs. But that does not mean that I think a law and order approach is an appropriate way to deal with these issues. The approach to illicit drug use and abuse of prescription drugs in Victoria is outdated, not evidence based and creates an unnecessary burden on the criminal justice and healthcare systems. We need a substantial rethink of how we reduce the harms of drugs.

In 2014 drugs and alcohol caused 384 deaths — these were traumatic deaths; these were people's families. We have to remember that the bulk of these deaths were alcohol related and acknowledge that alcohol causes countless harms to people's health, for which many people require hospitalisation. It adds significantly to the pressure on our hospital system, particularly in emergency departments. If you talk to any doctor or nurse who works in an emergency department on a Friday or Saturday night, they say that alcohol is a major problem, as well as other illicit drugs. In comparison, the road toll in 2014 was 248, so as you can see that deaths caused by drugs and alcohol are much higher.

We have a situation here in Victoria where people who are seeking help for their drug use sometimes have to wait months to get it. Having worked in community health centres and with people with mental health and drug-related issues, I know that if someone comes in and says, 'I want to get help', they need to get help pretty much immediately while they have the will, rather than us saying to them, 'Sorry, you are going to have to go away and wait for three months'. During that time, those people will still be using and sometimes

committing crimes to feed their habits. There are good and effective treatment programs out there, but not nearly enough of them. We need to make sure that health care is readily accessible to the people who need it.

Instead of prioritising harm minimisation by investing in the required health care and support, successive governments have taken a law and order approach to this issue, which research shows has failed to reduce deaths and drug use. In Australia we have one of the highest rates of illegal drug use per capita in the world, and the Victorian overdose death toll has now risen for the fifth consecutive year. Further, the law and order approach can lead to further social harms when people requiring health care and support are locked up. That hinders their recovery, and they are left with a criminal record that limits their job prospects.

We should also look at the economics of this. The average stay in prison for one year is about \$120 000; a year in rehabilitation, where a person has a chance to turn their life around, costs about \$40 000. That is a huge difference, and there is the likelihood that a person will not reoffend or go back to prison, so we also need to look at the economics of why treatment is better than prison.

We need to re-examine the evidence from Australia and overseas and look seriously at ways to reduce the harm of drug use and how we can support people to break their addiction. We must reduce the health and social impacts of drug use, and it is with that in mind that the Greens will obviously support the motion.

In recent months, my federal colleague Senator Richard Di Natale has publically made it clear that the Greens want a reconsideration of the approach to drugs and an examination of how Australia might take a similar approach to that of Portugal. I note that in recent weeks Ireland has adopted a similar approach to Portugal, and I commend it for that. While still criminalising drug dealing, Portugal treats individual drug use as a health issue, not a criminal one. This change in approach occurred over a decade ago when Portugal had some of the highest rates of heroin use in Europe. Since that time we have seen drug use in Portugal go down, not up. Our current laws do not act as a deterrent to use; they act as a deterrent to seek treatment.

Decriminalising drug use changes the culture. As we have seen with the Portugal model, it leads to people being more honest about their use, allowing health professionals to explore why these people are taking drugs in the first place and to give people advice and support that can help them to avoid the worst impacts,

such as dependency, contracting bloodborne viruses, overdosing and other health impacts. This helps users to reduce their use, get their life back on track and break their habit. The Portugal experience also shows us that it is not just about changing laws; it is about taking the money saved from no longer incarcerating people and investing it into treatment, rehabilitation, education, social support — such as housing and employment services — and prevention. We must move on from this currently outdated and ineffective war on drugs. In the last six months a number of very senior police officers have said that we cannot arrest our way out of this. We need to get smarter about how we are spending our money.

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre reports that Australian governments, both state and federal, spent approximately \$1.7 billion in 2009–10 on illicit drugs; with 66 per cent of this spent on law enforcement, 21 per cent on treatment, 9 per cent on prevention and 2 per cent on harm minimisation. That is 0.8 per cent of all government spending, and yet there has been little consideration of whether it is effective. In Victoria in 2009–10 spending on drug-related public prosecutions and legal aid was \$258 million. Add this to the cost of incarcerating drug users if they are convicted and you can see why the law and order approach is so expensive and ineffective. Our priorities are all wrong when it comes to expenditure on drugs, and I hope these things can be examined as part of an inquiry if this referral is successful.

I will take up a point made by Mr O'Donohue when he said that this would be a very broad-reaching referral. That is because the problem with drugs is very broad reaching. It has a number of facets, and we should not be examining one part of it; all of it is interlinked. If the opposition were concerned about this referral, it might have tried to amend it.

The Greens welcome an examination of roadside drug testing. Concerns have been raised about the accuracy of these tests and other issues. We welcome an examination of this so that the community can have more confidence in the system and so that drug-affected people are not on our roads. Ms Patten made the very important point that it is often the legal drugs that people are taking that impair their driving, so we should be examining for those as well to make sure that impaired people are not behind the steering wheel.

We also welcome an examination of drug detection activities, including the use of passive alert detection dogs at events. We have all heard the horror stories of young people bringing drugs to an event to share with their friends and once they see the dogs and the police

they consume large amounts of these drugs, which causes incredible harm.

We also need to examine the issue of synthetic drugs. For too long our approach to synthetic cannabinoids has been to ban them item by item in legislation only to have the producers tweak the recipe and reintroduce them onto the market. Clearly this approach has not been working. We need to reduce the potential harm of these untested products. We need to look at the New Zealand approach, both in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, and to rethink how we can approach this in Victoria. In the previous Parliament every few months it felt like we were dealing with another piece of legislation concerning another drug that had just had its chemical composition changed and its name changed, and we were never getting anywhere. I quite clearly remember the last time we debated such a piece of legislation. I said that in the future the Greens would not vote in support of such legislation until the government came up with a much better way of dealing with the issue.

There are many good elements in this referral, and I want to make a few general points at this stage. Prescription drugs are also a very big part of the problem. When it comes to overdoses, in 2014 they contributed to 82 per cent of all overdose deaths. I understand that this is a big referral, but at some stage we need to have another referral to deal with the issue of prescription drugs, not just have an emphasis on illicit drugs. The Greens think prescription medication deserves much greater attention.

Alcohol abuse also remains a significant issue in Victoria. Australians have a very bizarre attitude that alcohol is not a harmful drug. Yet with my past experience working with alcoholics I know it is a significant problem. Australians have a significant problem in the way they deal with alcohol. We also need to examine the issue of packaged liquor licence density and retailing hours, especially in disadvantaged areas.

Generally we need drug law reform. I am hoping that if this motion were to pass, sensible and good work could be done so that we come up with a report that would guide the government towards a position where, rather than lock people up in prison, we treat them in the community, return them to their homes and allow them to have new lives. For all of those reasons, the Greens will support this motion.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — As Mr O'Donohue has already indicated, the opposition does not support this motion. However, I want to at

least give some comfort to Ms Patten in that I agree with parts of this motion and it is healthy to bring this debate to the house. My hope is that we can perhaps set another time and place to look at some of the issues raised in paragraphs (1) to (6) of her motion.

As Mr O'Donohue indicated, in the previous Parliament I spent a considerable amount of time on a joint parliamentary committee looking at a number of inquiries in relation to crime prevention and drugs. At the time it was called the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. We did four inquiries over that four-year term. Perhaps the most exhaustive one in a personal and also an investigatory sense was the inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines, particularly ice, in Victoria. Going back to that time, ice was only talked about in a generalised way as being a new drug on the street that was having some impact on frontline services. Hospital emergency departments were also seeing some behavioural problems with those presenting at triage. It was fairly new, but at that time it was starting to impact on regional areas.

I congratulate the work done by Mary Wooldridge, who as a minister at the time was keen to pursue this inquiry. She helped support the introductory notes for the inquiry and obviously the work of the committee itself. I very much thank a former member for Eastern Victoria Region, Johan Scheffer, who was a big part of this inquiry. He is no longer with us in this chamber, but he is certainly alive and fit and well! As deputy chair of that committee he was a great support, as were David Southwick, Tim McCurdy and Ben Carroll, the members for Caulfield, Ovens Valley and Niddrie in the Assembly. They all provided significant support during the eight month-long inquiry.

In September 2014 the committee's report was tabled in Parliament, and it included 54 recommendations. From my point of view the most disappointing thing is that a number of those recommendations are yet to be responded to by the Andrews government. They were almost ignored in the Andrews government's rush to set up its own ice task force, which duplicated much of the work that had been done by the committee over a significant portion of the inquiry process. However, as Mr O'Donohue said, there were a number of good programs that the Napthine government introduced in response to the recommendations of the committee that we are continuing to see in part. Unfortunately some of those programs were cut, particularly local community programs and the Good Sports program, as well as the educational and promotional activities that the Napthine government embraced, particularly for schoolchildren. The Andrews government saw fit not to continue these programs.

It was pleasing to note in the discussions I had with former Chief Commissioner of Police Ken Lay that the work of that inquiry was incorporated into the deliberations of the national ice task force and that many of its outcomes came from the report of the Victorian parliamentary committee's inquiry into ice, so all was not lost in relation to the significant amount of work that was done by the committee. We submitted the inquiry's report to the New South Wales Parliament's inquiry into ice as well as to the ACT Parliament's inquiry. A lot of the committee's work helped other states to formulate their own recommendations and policies in response to the ice epidemic as we now know it.

It was not an epidemic at that time. In fact we found that the drug cohort had not increased in number so much. It was still around 2 per cent of the population, but it had shifted from the drugs of choice at the time, being ecstasy and cannabis, to methamphetamine. Then we saw the move to crystal meth, which as a powder form was more popular. In particular its purity was significantly higher than the tablet form and it was much easier to access given the demand for the product. Obviously where there is high demand, supply will follow.

I also inform Ms Patten that an awful lot of work was done in previous parliaments in relation to illicit drugs in general, and my concern, which is the same as Mr O'Donohue's, is that the number of points she has included in the motion makes it too large for one committee to do the appropriate investigative work. A lot of agencies are already doing a considerable amount of work in measuring the investment by state governments, departments, state or national drug agencies, crime commissions or the department of health in Canberra. There are many agencies associated with drug prevention, and there is a continual process of measurement, looking at returns on investment and seeing better ways to try to educate the population on the dangers of the misuse and abuse of drugs.

Ms Hartland was correct when she said in her contribution that the misuse and abuse of alcohol is by far the biggest social problem we have in this society. I am always very careful to make it clear, particularly to the public, that ice or methamphetamine or crystal meth is a significant social and health problem in our society, but alcohol is by far the worst. What is concerning is that I recently returned from Bangkok, where I met with a number of agencies. There is an escalation of opium production in certain countries and, as Ms Patten indicated, a significant shift from the traditional drugs, as we know them, to the more dangerous synthetic

drugs, which could rival or even surpass ice usage in the future.

While ice is the problematic illicit drug at the moment, we are going to see even more problematic drugs, including synthetic drugs that mimic current drugs, coming from South-East Asian countries into this country. Not only is there a rise in heroin use and production but we are seeing some of the NPS, which are the new psychoactive substances that Ms Patten talked about, rapidly emerging right across South-East Asia. No doubt, given Australia's appetite for drugs, we will see a significant supply line moving into this country, which will no doubt be stimulated by demand and a changing choice of drug use.

There is an opportunity to look, with some urgency, at some of these new and emerging drugs that are coming from South-East Asia, and I would encourage Ms Patten to put some energy into creating a mechanism whereby we can actually look at the impact of some of these new emerging drugs, which will probably displace some of the drugs that we are now dealing with as problematic illegal and illicit drugs, and be prepared for them, because we certainly have not been prepared for the significant shift from cannabis and heroin to ice. It has been said that states right across Australia are grappling with not only prevention and harm reduction but also rehabilitation, particularly in regional areas that do not have the resources to respond to what is needed. It is quite a long-term incubation period for drug addicts.

Ms Patten's motion also deals with road issues, which previous road safety committees have dealt with. There is a lot of evidence collected in relation to drug testing, both on roads and in the public space. Departments are continually evaluating the success of certain investments by government into responses to drugs, and I do not believe this committee — given, as Mr O'Donohue said, the breadth of the motion — would be able to do justice to what Ms Patten is seeking. I encourage her to continue to look at another forum where she might be able to stimulate some debate about not only the impact of the current programs but also the possible impacts of these newly emerging synthetic drugs that will have an even greater effect on the populace than ice is currently having.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to also place on record some comments in relation to this call for the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry in relation to a whole range of drug-related issues. I support Mr O'Donohue and his indication that the coalition will not be supporting the motion.

This is an unwieldy, huge reference. There is not a snowflake's chance in hell that it could be undertaken and completed by 3 March 2017. I would like to make a forecast that it will be held over between parliaments, at the very least, unless it is dramatically scaled down. For a whole range of reasons, I think it is unwise.

There is some outstanding work being done by agencies, as Ms Patten has indicated in her contribution, by government departments — the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure — and by some of the research institutes. There is no doubt that we have got to do better in the area of drug policy and the various programs that are delivered. Criminals will always find ingenious ways of circumventing laws and luring those who are the most vulnerable.

My concern with this particular motion, apart from the huge terms of reference, which are totally unwieldy, is that there is an underpinning ideology that I think should be a very serious cause for concern. If Ms Patten had simply called for the review of the effectiveness of drug treatment programs, I think we would have all embraced the motion wholeheartedly. We are all concerned about loss of life, diminution of life and diminution of opportunity as a result of the use of illicit drugs in particular, especially for young people.

There are statistics from many of the agencies and authorities. The Acting President, Mr Ramsay, has spoken about the devastating effect of alcohol. If you have a look at Eastern Europe, alcohol has had a much more devastating effect there than it has had in Australia — there hard liquor is consumed in much greater quantities. But let me say, parents are absolutely paralysed with fear of their children becoming addicted to drugs such as ice — much more so than their fear of their children using alcohol. Obviously education is hugely important. We need to raise children and people to use alcohol responsibly and not combine it with driving or activities that can endanger their lives or the lives of other people around them. I do not think there is anything inherently wrong with consuming alcohol, as long as it is in modest or moderate proportions. I am a mother and a former schoolteacher. I have educated hundreds and hundreds of children, including one who actually sits in this chamber. There is a view that somehow alcohol is a greater concern amongst parents and teachers than drugs; it is not.

In listing the terms of reference, paragraph (1) of the motion, Ms Patten calls for:

... reviewing the effectiveness of drug treatment ... in Victoria with recommendations on how treatment and harm

minimisation strategies could be used as an alternative to criminal penalties ...

That is already happening. I have seen the weakening of laws in relation to, say, cannabis use and the diversion programs that are in place. If you actually have a look at the way that the diversion programs work in relation to consumption of cannabis, every time someone is caught consuming cannabis, it is their first time, because there is actually no record of their previous offence. There has been a progressive weakening and softening of drug laws.

Implicit in paragraph (1) is that Ms Patten wants to see the expansion of strategies that are an alternative to criminal penalties. Clearly, we have heard Ms Patten call for the legalisation of LSD. Ms Patten has expressed a concern about the use of detection dogs at festivals. Everyone is concerned about young people consuming any illicit drugs, let alone dangerous quantities of drugs, but what we need to do is educate young people who are festivalgoers about what will await them when they get there, and educate them not to bring in illicit drugs and certainly not to bring in or use illicit drugs in any quantities let alone in quantities that are going to have potential fatalities.

Ms Patten — and clearly the government — wants to see an expansion of strategies that are an alternative to criminal penalties. What they want to see is a softening of drug laws. The argument is that our drug laws are just not able to cope. Implicit in that is that therefore, if our drug laws cannot cope, let us make it legal, decriminalise it and you get rid of the problem. No, you do not get rid of the problem; you just get rid of the statistics — just the statistics. Australia has a very high level of use of recreational drugs. I have argued over my 20 years of service to this Parliament — 10 years in the lower house and 9 years in the upper house — against every effort to soften and decriminalise drugs. I argued and led the opposition to the legalisation of marijuana — —

Ms Patten — How is that going?

Mrs PEULICH — I think it is going very well. As a teacher let me say, Ms Patten's attitude disturbs me, because I am not as concerned necessarily about what adults do to themselves as I am concerned about young people getting the message that drug use during their formative years is okay and that the use of gateway drugs, which marijuana has now proven to be, is very dangerous. Basically, if we normalise drug use, we are actually going to increase the problem. I seek not to normalise it.

That does not mean that people who do not believe in normalising or decriminalising or softening drug laws — which clearly the government supports, Ms Patten supports and the Greens support — believe that people who have drug problems should not be helped and helped by — —

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Mr Dalidakis, if you are intending to speak, do so.

Mr Dalidakis — I am sorry; I clearly interrupted one of the best oratory sessions this Parliament has ever heard.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Dalidakis!

Mrs PEULICH — You are so up yourself, Mr Dalidakis, that nothing else would fit.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Through the Chair.

Mr Dalidakis — You are a disgrace.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Dalidakis!

Mrs PEULICH — You are a disgrace. You are an arrogant, disrespectful disgrace. At your age, you ought to pull your head in.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mrs Peulich! Before I call Ms Hartland on a point of order, I ask Mrs Peulich to sit down for a moment.

Ms Hartland — On a point of order, Acting President, this is a really serious debate and this exchange of insults across the chamber is not helping it. I know you are about to do something about this, but I am really trying to listen to this debate.

Ms Lovell — On the point of order, Acting President, Mr Dalidakis was being deliberately provocative and insulting to Mrs Peulich. I found what he was shouting across the chamber to the member to be offensive, and I ask that he withdraw it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I advise Ms Lovell that she cannot ask for withdrawal. Mrs Peulich has not asked for a withdrawal, and she is in the chamber. I do not uphold the point of order, but I say to Mr Dalidakis that I did find his commentary offensive, and it certainly did not

help the debate. I ask Mrs Peulich to continue her contribution without interference.

I also say that we should be mindful that this is an important discussion we are having and the speakers have generally tried to put their points of view in a way that is respectful. The last conversation Mr Dalidakis had with Mrs Peulich was not, and I think he lowered the tone of the debate in this chamber. I ask Mr Dalidakis to allow Mrs Peulich to continue her contribution without assistance.

Mrs PEULICH — Coming back to the terms of reference, reviewing the effectiveness of Victorian government investment in illicit drug supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction strategies and programs could have been a reference on its own. It is a substantial reference. On reviewing the effectiveness of drug detection programs, including roadside testing and procedures for deploying drug detection activities at events, I would imagine that there is a lot of work already underway, and it is obviously going to be work that is undertaken by another agency. I would like to see more roadside detection programs, and I am sure the general public would too, as a way of discouraging people who are under the influence from being in charge of vehicles — for their own safety as well as that of other people.

Assessing the impact of prescription medication on road safety could have been a reference on its own. Reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of laws and regulations relating to illicit and synthetic drugs, along with the second part of the first term of reference, clearly indicates what the agenda here is — that is, to weaken the laws dealing with drug use and to decriminalise drug use so that our laws can cope with an increasing level of drug use. I contend that normalising and decriminalising drug use, as I said before, may change the statistics but it will not change the culture or the use.

As a parent and former schoolteacher, I am not interested in softening drug laws. I am not interested in sending softer messages to young people who are in their formative years. I want this community and this society to continue sending a very strong message that the use of illicit drugs is something that is undesirable and harmful and ought to be discouraged and that yes, as a society, for those who fall into the grip of the use of illicit drugs, in particular ice, which can devastate lives, we are going to help. At the end of the day, I do not want to hear economic arguments about helping to save people's lives. I do not want to hear how much it costs to do this versus that. We need to do what we need to do. If that means injecting more money into

rehabilitation programs where clearly there is a need, then we ought to do that.

In addition to that, in assessing the practices of other Australian states and territories and overseas jurisdictions and their approach to drug law reform and how other positive reforms could be adopted by Victorian law, I can certainly see that Ms Patten, who is in a powerful position as one of the Independents, has used this opportunity to load up the terms of reference of this inquiry in a way that she can expect to deliver on her platform and that of her party. She has made it clear what that is.

I believe softening our drug laws is retrograde. I believe we do have a recreational drug use problem. I think to further decriminalise drug use is to normalise drugs. I do not believe in the car chase analogy — that just because the criminal might be driving off with your car you catch up with him and give him the car keys. I think we need to change our attitude, and I do not believe the lax attitude which we have been progressively adopting has worked. I remember the misguided attempt by former Premier Kennett — and I must say I admired many of the things he did — to consider the establishment of heroin injecting rooms. We had a very long and heated debate on that particular issue while Jeff Kennett was the Premier. I also remember launching the anti-drug coalition here in Queen's Hall, which led the opposition to that idea, and I am glad Mr Kennett backed away from it.

In closing, I say that the alcohol problem that has been mentioned is not just an issue here; it is an issue everywhere. It is about learning how to use and consume alcohol moderately and responsibly. I oppose this reference for a number of reasons, the most important being that a lot of work is already being undertaken. It is far too broad, and it smacks of an agenda to soften the drug laws and normalise drug use. My concern is that Ms Patten and other Independent members, along with the Greens, will use their very considerable power in this chamber to do a deal with the government in order to weaken those laws.

The more cynical side of me, having been around for a while, reflects on what has happened with the end-of-life choices inquiry, where a similar thing happened and everyone got on board. I did not. I thought a lot of that work could have been better undertaken by departmental staff with a higher degree of professionalism and expertise. Nonetheless, it went through and we all got on board, and then the government trumped it by embarking on a parallel process. The cynical part of me could say this is yet another very big inquiry that is going to be used to keep

a number of government members, but more importantly opposition members, very busy. At the end of the day, the government will do what the government will do.

With those few words, I think it is important for this house to send a very clear message to the community that we are not going to soften drug laws; we are going to look at drug rehabilitation and make sure it is effectively resourced. We are not going to normalise drug use, and we are certainly not going to cave in to it.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak on the motion moved by Ms Patten. I have to say at the very beginning that on looking at this particular motion the first thing that strikes me is the impracticality of having all these issues considered by one committee made up of a relatively small group of MPs.

My view is that if a group of six, seven or eight MPs were to be given the job of examining all these issues, those MPs would not have time to do anything else and the committee would report somewhere around about 2022, I would imagine, because it is going to take that long to examine these very weighty and important issues. I certainly do not dispute the importance of many of these issues, even if I do dispute the direction that some of them may take us in. I think it is impractical. My view is that big is not necessarily always beautiful. And this is big; this does not get much bigger. In my years in this Parliament I do not think I have seen a bigger recommendation or a bigger proposed reference to a committee.

If this motion is passed, this will keep us going for a very long time, and at the end of it I am not sure we will be any the wiser because over the period of this reference there would be changes. We have seen over the last two, three, four or five years that things change constantly. It is a moving feast, and to take all of these issues on board in the one reference is asking far too much. I ask Ms Patten to have a think about that. She raised some meaty issues, as I said, with regard to this issue, but I do not think they can be all done together. I think that is impractical and it is something that we should consider.

Ms Patten and I — and this will surprise many people — are alike in at least one way. Nobody will ever die wondering where we stand on just about anything. That may well be the only thing we have in common, I do not know; but the fact of the matter is that Ms Patten has been very forthright and very honest in her attitude to illicit drugs. She has a policy of legalising a good number of them and softening the

attitude of society to the use of others that she does not want decriminalised or legalised altogether, and I have to say that I do not agree with that attitude. I do not believe we are going to solve the drug problem by making drugs easier to access. I do not believe we are going to cure alcoholism by giving out bottles of Johnny Walker, which is the equivalent of the proposal that Ms Patten has put, perhaps indirectly, in this motion today.

The last message that we need to send to the community right now is that we are going soft on drugs. As you pointed out when you made your contribution, Acting President, at a time when the ice epidemic is causing massive problems right around this nation, indeed right around the world, the last thing we need to do as a Parliament is to send a message to the community, particularly to young people in our community, that we are going soft on drugs or that drug abuse is perhaps not as bad as we previously had thought, because it is. It kills people, it destroys individuals, it destroys families and it destroys communities.

We must stand strong in our opposition to illicit drugs. We must send a firm message to every corner of every community in the state that we as a Parliament will not be backing away from our fierce opposition to illicit drugs. I have to say, as Ms Patten has said — and I said a moment ago that we might only have one thing in common but I will throw in another one just to make her day — that I agree with her when she says that we cannot do the same thing the same way and expect a different result.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr FINN — Okay, I will cut out the — —

Ms Lovell — Cut out the crap!

Mr FINN — There is no crap, I can assure Ms Lovell, but I do agree that if you do the same thing the same way and expect a different result, that is quite insane. In fact it is the definition of insanity.

One thing we have not done in this state is to actually get fair dinkum about drugs. We have not got fair dinkum about drugs. We have not given our law enforcement agencies the resources they need to fight the drug problem. We have not had a judiciary for years that takes the drug problem seriously. How many times have I heard police officers complain to me about how they arrest drug dealers, only for those drug dealers to go to the court, get a slap on the finger and then go out on the street selling again. In fact I recall one police officer telling me that one drug dealer was released by

the magistrate and there he was on the steps of the courthouse selling drugs as the police officer left. How devastating must that be? It must have an impact on the police's desire to arrest these people.

We have got to get fair dinkum and, as I said earlier — this is not Liberal Party policy by the way — my very strong view is that drug lords should be met with capital punishment. We have to get really serious about this. This is an issue that is ripping our state and our nation apart and we are nowhere near serious enough about it.

I could talk about education, I could talk about rehabilitation, and I would love to do that at much greater length but I am being given the finger here — I am being told to wind up. I will do that, but I will just say one thing to the house, and that is that we must not wave the white flag on this. We must not give up. We must go in harder against drugs. Let me tell members that the only time we will lose the war on drugs is when we stop fighting. We must never stop fighting. I oppose this motion. I oppose this reference. I know where it is trying to take us, and I oppose that too.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I would like to briefly sum up the debate on my motion to require a committee to consider and report by March 2017 on the effectiveness of laws and procedures relating to illicit and synthetic drugs and prescription medication. I appreciate the contributions from Ms Symes, Mr O'Donohue, Ms Hartland, Mr Ramsay, Mrs Peulich and, finally but definitely not least, Mr Finn.

I would like to touch on Mr Finn's points. He noted — and I appreciate his honesty — that we may have some things in common, and I agree. Oddly enough, I think Mrs Peulich, Mr Finn and I are actually all in agreement that the current drug laws are not working and that we need to do something about them. I do not agree with Mr Finn that we should bring back capital punishment; I think that might be going a bit far.

I appreciate the very thoughtful comments of Mr Ramsay and Mr O'Donohue. I do take on board that this is a big inquiry and that a lot of work has been done in the past. I very much appreciate the work of the inquiry into methamphetamines; I keep that report on my desk. I think it is a very good report and has some great recommendations.

Mr Bourman interjected.

Ms PATTEN — No, not the methamphetamine, Mr Bourman; just the report!

To say, however, that this inquiry is too big raises the question: when are we going to do this? We need to do something, not to keep on saying, 'It's too hard'. We have been saying that for 50 years: 'It's too hard to deal with this, so let's not do anything'. Now is the time to do something. I really appreciate Ms Hartland starting with the story of Footscray. We did not do anything then and we saw a daily death toll on the front of the *Herald Sun*, and we are continuing to see this. We need to do something about it. Mr Ramsay recognised the new and emerging synthetic substances that are coming on to the market and the need to do something about them. Yes, we do, but we cannot deal with those substances in isolation. The perverse effect of our current drug laws — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I asked Ms Patten to pause for a moment. There are about eight conversations going on here. It is not fair for Ms Patten, who is addressing a serious subject on which she has put a motion to the chamber. If members want a conversation, they should go outside and have it. I thought we wanted to finish reasonably early tonight. I think the way the chamber is behaving at the moment, it might be a long night.

Ms PATTEN — I was saying that the Acting President in his contribution recognised the very dangerous emergence of the new psychoactive substances that are coming out in waves — and we are looking at more than two a week. However, we cannot deal with them in isolation. We have this perverse effect that some of our current drug laws are actually leading to a greater number of these new psychoactive substances. I therefore agree with Ms Hartland that we need to look at this as a whole. Our treatments need to be accessible and effective, and we need to review what we are currently doing so we can improve upon that. We need to look at overseas models, and I certainly would recommend my colleagues looking at Portugal; it has done some amazing things.

This is not going soft on drugs. It is not about being soft on drugs. It is about dealing with drugs; it is about dealing with the problem. It is about being brave enough to do something and not saying that it is too big and too hard. As Ms Symes mentioned in her contribution, the government is doing something, and it is following on from the good work the previous government did on methamphetamines. It is doing good work on the ice plan in rolling out ways to deal with this insidious substance, but in particular, as Ms Symes mentioned, we need to look at regional areas, and this is where we are lacking. We are lacking in education in those regional areas, and we are lacking in treatment in those regional areas, and I very much hope that this

inquiry will address those things. I understand that it is a big inquiry, but this is a big problem, and we need to deal with it as a whole and, I think, with compassion and strength. I commend the motion.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 20

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

Noes, 18

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

Pairs

Shing, Ms	Davis, Mr
-----------	-----------

Motion agreed to.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) acknowledges the serious drought that is continuing to develop in Victoria;
- (2) notes that —
 - (a) monthly rainfall has been up to 50 per cent below the statewide average;
 - (b) some regions are experiencing a second consecutive year of extensive crop failures;
 - (c) comments by the Minister for Agriculture delighting in the continued lack of rain over the grand final eve long weekend;

and calls on the government to develop urgent assistance packages for farmers and country communities.

I am being forced to move this motion largely due to the fact that nothing has been happening on the government's part. This is a critical and urgent issue and as far as droughts go it has crept up on a large portion of the community.

Those of us who are better connected to the rural sector have been hearing the warnings and the stories and about the hardship for many months now. A large part of the state experienced a very poor year last year. Last year, I might add, was very different from any other because effectively the state was divided up into a range of areas that had greatly contrasting seasons. If you look at the large portion of the state that is the Mallee, you would see that it had a reasonable year with reasonable returns. Unusually, if you then continue down a bit to the Wimmera region, you see that it had a horrible year, with many of the farms there not even electing to harvest their crops; they were either cutting them down for hay or simply letting them lie where they fell.

If you then progress across to the east of the state, to central and eastern Victoria, you see that many farmers recorded their best crops ever; they had stunning seasons. And there was everything in between. It is interesting that in 2014 winter crops were a total mixed bag. However, there were large parts of the state — from the Horsham region right across to the Wedderburn area, across a large part of the Wimmera and into central Victoria and then up north — that were very poor due to not getting rainfall. The return from winter crops in those areas was quite poor. Victoria was not in a complete state of drought last year, although large portions of it experienced very poor returns due to a lack of rainfall.

As the crops went in this winter there were some substantial rainfalls earlier in the year that gave some cereal growers in some regions a large degree of confidence. A large portion of the crops looked pretty good early on. However, again, the further we went into the season, the further below the average rainfall was received by these crops. This culminated in quite a dry winter. I think everybody in Melbourne, and even in central Victoria, would remember thinking the winter we just had was extremely cold; it was a real winter's winter. But many people have forgotten that it was quite a dry winter. Yes, it was cold as all get out, but it did not deliver the rains for our winter crops that we would have far preferred. As we came to the end of winter and we entered spring there was still great hope and a great opportunity for quite a solid year; all we needed was the traditional spring rains that we normally get. They would have effectively given our crops the opportunity to fill out and produce the returns and yields that farmers in those regions were hoping for. Alas that was not to be, with September rainfall down as much as 50 per cent from the average September rainfall we are accustomed to.

Therefore we now have a situation where up around the Mallee, predominantly because those sandy, lighter soils of that region need less rain to produce a reasonable yield from those crops — certainly with wheat — there will be some returns; some of those crops are going to be half-reasonable. However, again, when you look at those large portions of some of our biggest crop production areas of the Wimmera, where we tend to get in normal years the mainstay of our wheat crops and our harvest, it has been another deplorable year. There are going to be many, many thousands of farming families that are effectively going to be going without an income for the second year running.

There have been literally hundreds, and potentially thousands, of farmers who took the option about a month ago of cutting their crops for hay. Right on the cusp they had to make that critical decision about whether they were going to cut their crops for hay or take the risk that we would get some late spring rains that would actually bring through the filling out of the head and create the yields they have been hoping for and half expecting — because if there is one thing our farming fraternity does, it is remain optimistic. It hopes the rains will come and that the crops will fill out. But if you drove around regional and country Victorian in the last month or so, you could have seen that a large portion of those crops were in fact cut for hay in early October. As you drive around you see many of those wheat fields now have the large bales wrapped up ready for sale.

An article in the paper this week reported that those people who have chosen that option have effectively opted for about a 50 per cent return on their investment, as opposed to what they would have expected to receive had they been able to let their crops run their term and taken them off sometime in December or, more southerly in the state, in the early weeks of January. This is a situation that has been rearing its head over the last two or three months. It is an area that is gaining traction. Certainly the significance and the urgency of the drought that is happening here in Victoria is something that is now really coming to the fore. It is now that people start looking to governments to see whether they are prepared and whether they have put plans in place so that they can assist some of these communities, families and businesses that, through no fault of their own, find themselves going through a second or even a third year without the incomes that they had projected.

That is why this motion finds its way to the table today. What The Nationals and the coalition as a whole are trying to do is make the government fully aware — we

want to put this issue front and centre — so that there is no doubt whatsoever about the seriousness of it or the capacity that has been taken away from many of these communities. We wish the seriousness and extent of the drought, as well as how many of these small communities are going to be hard hit by this lack of income, to be recognised.

The biggest concern from our perspective is that there does not seem to have been any planning done or any program put in readiness for this potential drought that is now going to hit. The rains we had last week were effectively too little too late. The crops have grown to their maximum, whatever that is going to be, which ranges from nothing to a mediocre yield. However, we are now in a situation where many of these people who are experiencing this firsthand are starting to look around and say, 'What have the respective levels of government got in place to help us through so that we can continue in our business and in our communities to have the confidence to butter up and work our way through it, whether that be with our other farming enterprises, whether that be in sheep and cattle or in other crops — maybe even summer crops — or whether that be in other ways?'

We all know that members of the farming community are very entrepreneurial in the way they are able to diversify their businesses so that they are not just what you might call 'one-trick ponies' in relation to their enterprises. This is what has happened over the years. Many farmers now have two or three strings to their bow so that when the drought hits and the crops fail there are opportunities for them to continue on. That does not mean they do not need help. In fact what we need to do now is ensure that there is a whole range of programs in place to give these farming enterprises the confidence they need to go back to the bank and to eliminate thoughts of selling the farm. Of course if the situation is as dire as it is looking in some instances, then that is what some farmers will need to do — they will need to exit the industry. That is what happened during the millennium drought. The role of state government at that time was effectively to facilitate that.

When we look around and see what is in place for these struggling families, the answer is a very short 'nothing'. The answer is: absolutely zilch. It is very disappointing that when you look around you see that the Minister for Agriculture has not put out any press releases about any programs. The only thing we have heard from the Minister for Agriculture about the drought that is emerging in her backyard is the fact that she is having some squabble with the federal government about paying the administration costs of the loans that are

being put in place by the federal government. If we are going to get to a situation where the only contribution that is going to be made is a squabble between Jaala Pulford and Barnaby Joyce, then that is not going to do anybody any good. Nor is it any good having a state government that does not even accept that it needs to take on some administrative costs to roll some of these programs out.

So these concessional loans that have been put in place have worked very well in the past. It is quite a significant step to take to go back and refinance your entire farm and enterprise finances to achieve this lower rate of interest. However, as you would be aware, Acting President, that is exactly what many people are forced to do when it comes to some of the extreme debt that the modern farmer deals with on an ongoing basis.

This measure gives these farmers the option that if things get really tight, and there is an opportunity to receive two or three percentage points less than they are paying through the standard banking structures, they have the option to go down that path.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! In accordance with standing orders, I will interrupt business as it is now time for statements on reports and papers.

Business interrupted pursuant to resolution of Council on 22 October.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Regional Development Victoria: report 2014–15

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to speak today on Regional Development Victoria's annual report for 2014–15. The report covers the final five months of the coalition term in government and then the first six months of Labor's term. Along with the change in government, there seem to be changes in action and development in the regions. In the 'Highlights' section of the report it is mentioned that Regional Development Victoria (RDV) used its policy and program delivery expertise to develop legislation, regulation and program design to establish the \$500 million Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. It also highlights that 10 public grant program streams of the fund were launched.

There is mention of collaboration with regional stakeholders, reviews of the current regional strategic planning model, facilitated forums, networking with local governments and interaction with businesses. So we have had collaboration, reviews, forums,

networking and interaction. It seems to me that these highlights involve a lot of talking and not really a lot of action by the Labor government. When we get to the highlights that actually involve real results we hear about some of the outcomes of coalition-developed initiatives. We hear about the support of structural adjustment and growth through place-based initiatives under the coalition government in areas such as the Latrobe Valley in my electorate. This included \$2.5 million from the coalition towards the \$5 million Gippsland heavy industry park project, which was announced in August 2014 to drive industry development and help grow the local economy.

There is the highlight of supporting local food processing initiatives in Gippsland in my electorate, including an expansion by Riviera Farms at Stratford and Lindenow. The coalition invested \$135 000 towards Riviera Farms' \$1.3 million expansion in vegetable production and processing in East Gippsland. This great project helped secure 60 jobs at Riviera Farms and helped boost the company's employment of people living in the area. Another listed highlight is Australian Fresh Salads' new investment in fresh salad growing, processing, packaging and distribution in the Macalister irrigation district, again in my electorate, which created 20 jobs. The Victorian coalition government invested \$200 000 from its \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund to enable the company to expand its vegetable processing facilities in Maffra to increase production and productivity. Australian Fresh Salads is a major producer of fresh cut salads, and it was fantastic to see the company investing heavily in regional Gippsland by undertaking a \$1.5 million expansion project with the support of the coalition government. Also in Gippsland, support was provided for Viplus's second stage re-establishment of dairy processing operations at Toora.

The final highlight listed in RDV's report is one I wish to focus on. It lists the attraction of a record 10 156 visitors to the 2015 Regional Victoria Living Expo. This three-day event at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre showcased the benefits of living and investing in regional and rural Victoria. This year, 48 regional and rural councils and thousands of Victorians took part in this successful expo, which helped drive tourism and economic development in our rural communities. RDV's annual report notes that the expo 'proved particularly popular with young families and working professionals' and that 'councils continue to receive positive enquiries from attendees keen to move' into the area. However, it is sad that this Labor government has not committed to running this expo again. Without a set date and confirmation of the expo, the regional and rural

councils are unable to plan and block out necessary dates for 2016. This could be highlighting the death of this great event.

It is quite clear to me that regional and rural Victoria had more opportunities to prosper under a coalition government. RDV acting chief executive James Flintoft in his foreword talks about RDV continuing as the government's lead agency responsible for driving economic and community development across regional and rural Victoria. There is no doubt RDV provided great support to the coalition when in government, and I hope that under the new government there are further real opportunities for regional Victoria. We need less talk and more action.

Auditor-General: *Department of Education and Training — Strategic Planning*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's report entitled *Department of Education and Training — Strategic Planning*, which was tabled in October 2015. I am deeply interested in the reports of the education department to this Parliament, as my abiding interest as a member of Parliament is to strive to influence, as much as possible, the very best educational outcome for kids who attend schools in Victoria. I was, however, somewhat surprised to see that 27 Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) investigations of this department have occurred over the last five years. Whether the department is overly used to or has become blasé about VAGO audits, or possibly has refocused its priorities on day-to-day issues I am not sure. In the department's favour, the report states that there appears to be a solid framework to advance a strategic plan across the department, but it would seem, according to the report, that there is insufficient communication and consultation, which may ultimately be a critical failure factor for the future.

Put simply, the Department of Education and Training has the responsibility for providing an effective, efficient and accessible cradle-to-adulthood learning and development system that supports students and service providers across Victoria. If the department is to reach its goal of becoming a world leader in learning and development, it must apply the principle of ensuring its priorities are not unduly diverted by operational issues. I am sure the department understands the necessity of planning effectively and strategically in order to meet its targets and achieve its desired outcomes. The department is now three years into its 10-year time frame, and while no appreciable advancement towards its goal appears to have been made, it is critical that steps be taken to put its

long-term objective back on track. It is true that the department's many accomplishments include the management of over 1500 government schools, together with a budget of approximately \$12 million.

I know the 10-year plan in furtherance of world-class leadership in learning and development is an ambitious target and certainly worthy of pursuit. We encourage the department to continue to make some worthwhile progress towards this objective. The Auditor-General's report makes several recommendations aimed at improving the current strategic master plan. I am sure we would all like to see Victoria lead the world in education and training programs and facilities.

Goulburn-Murray Water: report 2014–15

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I rise to make a brief contribution on the annual report of Goulburn-Murray Water for 2014–15. The report talks about the Goulburn-Murray Water Connections Project, which, it states, is a significant contributor to job creation and investment in northern Victoria. The report goes on to say that:

It not only delivers water savings as part of the Victorian contribution to the MDBP —

the Murray-Darling Basin plan —

but gives landowners the opportunity to improve their on-farm productivity by taking advantage of a more efficient irrigation system.

If only all of that were true. Last week the Senate select committee looking at the Murray-Darling Basin plan held hearings in Shepparton and Echuca. At both meetings the senators heard of grave concerns in our community about the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin plan on farmers and urban areas. While I think there was strong support for the plan from the environmental sector, significant concerns were raised by both farming and urban communities in northern Victoria. It did not matter whether it was the meeting in Shepparton, which was attended by a lot of people from the upper catchment, or the meeting in Echuca; concerns were coming from urban areas such as Rochester and Molesworth.

The senators heard a very passionate plea from our community for a slowing down and reassessment of the Murray-Darling Basin plan, because they believe far too much water is being taken out of the Goulburn-Murray irrigation district. We know our area was probably targeted for water because Victoria had the most mature market and was already engaged in significant trading of water. We were easy pickings because of good policy in the past which had developed

a mature trading market. But the irrigators talked about the loss of water and the impact it would have on their farms. We heard that \$144 million in annual farmgate revenue has already been lost because of the water that has gone to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder as part of the Murray-Darling Basin plan.

Farmers talked about the cost to their business and the sustainability of the industry, particularly the dairy industry, going forward with such large amounts of water leaving our area. They talked about the amount of permanent water that has been purchased out of the area and how that is driving up the cost of temporary water. Many farmers have sold off their permanent water, whether to reduce debt resulting from the drought or as part of the connections program — although obviously as part of the connections program there is an investment in infrastructure in return for the permanent water that will be delivered through savings. The cost of temporary water has gone beyond \$300 a megalitre already this season. It is tipped to continue to rise. That is putting the viability and future of many of our farmers at risk.

Our food processors also talked about risk. They talked about concern for the sustainability of the supply to their factories and about how that will reduce the opportunity for growth. They talked about their reluctance to invest in new infrastructure, and we heard about \$70 million of intended investment in infrastructure that has been put on hold because of the uncertainty the Murray-Darling Basin plan is creating.

From the townships, particularly Molesworth and Rochester, we heard of fears about the environmental flows and the probability of flooding. As people will know, Rochester has recently been through a flood, and it is very fresh in their minds just how devastating a flood can be. People from Molesworth are particularly concerned about the environmental flows, which they feel cannot be achieved without significant flooding of urban areas and townships in the Goulburn-Murray area. I urge the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water to work with the federal government to reassess the plan and come up with a more appropriate one for Victoria.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the house do now adjourn.

School asbestos removal

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. It regards his government's promise to have all asbestos removed from all Victorian government schools, including those in the Shepparton Assembly electorate, by 2020. My request is: can the minister detail the annual budget allocations that will be made to schools in the Shepparton electorate to achieve the removal of all asbestos by 2020?

The Andrews Labor government has promised to make all Victorian government schools asbestos-free by 2020. Advice provided by the former Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and asbestos reports conducted over the past decade confirm that 1200 government schools in Victoria contain asbestos, including 38 in the Shepparton electorate. The department advises that the cost of removal is projected to be \$800 million, almost 20 times the amount the government has allocated in the 2015–16 budget for its asbestos-removal program. Further, for the government to achieve its promise of making all government schools asbestos-free by 2020, it would have had to start removing asbestos two months ago and work at a rate of 23 schools per month and a cost of \$15.4 million per month and maintain this rate consistently until January 2020.

Shepparton High School is just one of many schools that need the government's assistance to remove significant amounts of asbestos. Shepparton high's most recent asbestos report, conducted in 2011, showed 16 instances of asbestos requiring immediate attention, 16 requiring attention as soon as possible and another 400-plus instances of lower grade asbestos throughout the school. The report is almost as thick as a ream of paper. There is hardly a room in the school that is not affected. Instances in the most urgent categories — priority 0 or priority 1 — were all removed during the term of the former government. However, years of work will be required to remove all asbestos from this school.

During a recent meeting the shadow Minister for Education, the member for Ferntree Gully in the Assembly, and I had with the school, we raised the impact asbestos has on its daily operations and what the impact of the government's planned removal program will be. The school advised that there has been continued deterioration since the most recent report was compiled, and that discussions have taken place about how long it will be able to continue before it needs to decommission the gym, repairs to which cannot be undertaken as the exact location of asbestos cannot be

identified. The home economics and science rooms are riddled with asbestos, but because both contain specialised equipment they cannot be easily replaced with portable classrooms. No-one from the department has even been out to install asbestos signage in the school.

Years and years of work needs to be done at this school, and it needs to begin immediately if there is to be any hope of it being concluded by 2020. Further, other improvement works for the school cannot be started until the government advises how it intends to tackle the asbestos removal, meaning the new facilities the school requires to provide students with a quality education cannot be implemented while the asbestos issue hangs over the school. My request of the minister is that he detail the annual budget allocations that will be made to schools in the Shepparton electorate to achieve the removal of all asbestos by 2020.

Nadrasca

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, and it is in regard to a social enterprise company, Nadrasca, that has its head office in Nunawading. Nadrasca specialises in getting employment and training for people with disabilities. It is currently going through a minor issue in getting assistance from a registered training organisation to provide the excellent training it requires. The action I seek is for the minister to ask his department to assist Nadrasca with this particular issue, which is obviously time sensitive because the company wants to continue with its training next year.

Renewable energy

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — The matter I raise tonight is for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. There is growing potential for renewable energy in western Victoria. This is being led by the wind industry, which has put in a number of planning applications and will hopefully have some extra wind turbines on the ground in the new year. Also this week the first wave energy project was started in Port Fairy by BioPower Systems, a company that has a \$21 million pilot project, and it will be great to see the results. The wave energy project will feed 250 kilowatts of renewable energy into the national grid, and a lot of that will be used by the abalone farm just onshore from where the pilot project is being put in place.

There are numerous other opportunities for renewable energy in western Victoria, including geothermal energy, which the township of Portland and its council

has previously used in hospitals and public buildings. There is the manufacture of turbines, particularly wind turbines, and the potential for the manufacture of other renewable technologies such as solar. Currently a lot of the panels are imported through the port of Portland and distributed throughout the state. In relation to biomass from wood pellets, the Glenelg Shire Council has approximately 25 per cent of the state's pine plantations. Biochar from organic waste for cogeneration and liquid natural gas are alternative fuels.

Supportive communities of businesses such as the port of Portland, Keppel Prince and Skilled Engineering as well as many other businesses including many skilled operators are keen to see this area developed. The city of Portland is perfectly situated and enthusiastic about moving into renewable energy and becoming the renewable energy hub of Australia. I ask the minister to financially support the development of this hub in Portland.

Deer Park level crossing

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport, and it concerns a letter that I was copied into recently. It is from Daniel Attard of Deer Park, obviously a constituent, and it says:

I am writing to you regarding an escalating safety issue pertaining to the railway crossing at Mount Derrimut Road, Deer Park, adjacent to the Deer Park V/Line train station.

Since the completion of works relating to the regional rail link, there have been, and still are, frequent and significant malfunctions with increasing regularity regarding the operation of the boom gates. Most recently, this morning the boom gates were down for a continual period of approximately 25 minutes.

Often, during the morning and afternoon peak periods, the boom gates are down for significant lengths of time — in regular cases between 25 and 40 minutes. This includes periods of up to 10 or 12 minutes where no train is either arriving or departing the platforms at Deer Park station. Leaving aside the issue of significant traffic congestion due to the length of time vehicle traffic is not able to proceed across the train lines, there is increasing frustration in the local community which is leading to dangerous behaviour on the part of train commuters, pedestrians and cyclists in attempting cross over and around the safety gates.

On many occasions Victoria Police officers have been present at the crossing during morning periods. When Victoria Police are not present, I have personally witnessed on countless occasions pedestrians, rail commuters and cyclists climbing over or walking around the safety barriers while the crossing alarm is sounding and the boom gates are down. Several times I have witnessed motorcyclists riding around the boom gates and passengers in vehicles attempting to raise the smaller boom gate by hand and allow vehicles through.

There is clearly a fault with the operation of the boom gates —

I would say that is pretty true —

that has yet to be rectified. As stated, safety is the primary issue; however, the congestion that happens during many peak periods is incredibly frustrating for locals and can drastically increase commuting and travelling times.

...

The behaviour of locals, while being dangerous, is certain to result in a serious — and likely fatal — accident if rectification works are not immediately undertaken.

Mr Attard has contacted Public Transport Victoria and VicRoads and has heard nothing. Obviously this is of grave concern to the people of Deer Park and the people who use that level crossing. It is not an insignificant level crossing, and it is important that as a matter of urgency the minister ask her department to carry out the rectification works on this level crossing to make it safer and easier for all concerned.

National assessment program — literacy and numeracy

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, Mr Merlino, and it is in regard to the services provided by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority relating to national assessment program — literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) testing. This was the subject of questions I asked in the last sitting week of the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, as the representative in this house of the Minister for Education. The questions I asked related to whether the company NCS Pearson is the sole provider of NAPLAN services to the Department of Education and Training. The written answer from the minister was that NCS Pearson currently holds the primary contract for a range of services associated with the delivery of NAPLAN testing in Victoria.

I also asked a supplementary question as to whether any of NCS Pearson's commercial products available on its website as effective teaching resources for NAPLAN preparation had been purchased by any Victorian schools. The answer to that was:

Neither the Department of Education and Training nor VCAA hold any data regarding specific materials purchased by schools.

The brief background to this is that there have been concerns raised in New South Wales, where Pearson holds a \$41.6 million contract for providing NAPLAN marking and other services, and it has held that contract since 2011. There have been concerns raised about the

potential conflict of interest in holding such a large contract for the provision of these NAPLAN services. As I pointed out in my question, the company is privy to a lot of information and raw data with regard to student and school results, and at the same time another arm of the company is involved in selling textbooks, both online and in hard copy, about various subjects — how to prepare for NAPLAN et cetera.

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 7 September this year questions were raised by the New South Wales Teachers Federation and University of Queensland Professor Bob Lingard, who said 'the contract potentially amounted to state-sponsored market research'. I would like the minister to follow up and do some research as to whether NCS Pearson, which he says holds the primary contract, is selling any of its related publications in Victorian schools.

Geelong–Melbourne rail service

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Public Transport, and it concerns an issue that has been a significant problem for over six months. This is in relation to the overcrowding of the Geelong–Southern Cross rail service. Much has been made of the current review the government is doing with the regional community transport hearings and also the changes to timetables. Some of the consultations started way back in December and January, and a lot of people were not able to engage with that because of the holidays. Putting that aside, we have a significant problem — that is, more people are using the rail service and consequently we are seeing significant overcrowding, particularly on the Geelong line during peak hours.

Recent statistics have indicated that more than half of V/Line's peak Geelong trains were fully packed out for the month of August. V/Line's snapshot data for the month revealed 7 of its 12 morning services on the Geelong line between 6.00 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. were at full capacity. The figures, which only record up to 100 per cent capacity, showed that the same amount of evening services departing from Melbourne between 4.00 p.m. and 6.30 p.m. were absolutely chock-a-block full. Even the two largest trains, with 455 seats — the 6.30 a.m. from South Geelong and the 6.49 p.m. from Marshall — were crowded. Not surprisingly, the smallest train, with just 222 seats, which was the 7.14 a.m. from South Geelong, was also at full capacity. The South Geelong train was 100 per cent full, and the Marshall train was 90 per cent full.

I am sure many travellers who use this service will tell you that at peak times, even with the services running

every 20 minutes, they are over capacity. There is an urgent need for the minister to do what she can to allocate more carriages for those peak services. They cannot run any more frequently because they are at capacity on the track now. With the regional rail link and also with the Ballarat line converging into the Southern Cross dedicated track, there is no more capacity on track, except to possibly use the direct Southern Cross through to Werribee line, which is something the minister might well want to look at.

But at this time we need more carriages to put more people onto these peak time services that are obviously overstretched and at full capacity. My urgent request to the minister is that she look at any opportunity to increase capacity on the rail track between Geelong and Southern Cross to enable passengers to at least travel in some comfort and safety, but also to have the opportunity to be able to use the service at all, given the full capacity at those peak times.

Western Victoria Region disability services

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing. I and I am sure a lot of other members in this house and in the other place are involved in our electorates with issues around disability, access to services and facilities, and a range of aspects. But in particular for regional MPs the issues of geographic distance and isolation often compound issues that people already experience in respect of disability. My office has been working with a number of groups in Portland and Warrnambool. There are different issues, but I am particularly wedded to a group of parents who are very concerned about their adult children and the living arrangements they need to find in order for the parents to move on. Indeed once the parents pass they need to have a living arrangement that is going to work for them.

I am seeking an opportunity for the minister to come down to the south-west region next month to meet with constituents who have disabilities and also the parents of children who have disabilities. I also would like him to attend a forum in Warrnambool to get feedback on the national disability insurance scheme and a whole range of other issues. The action I seek is for the minister to come down to the south-west as soon as practicable, and definitely next month, so that he can have firsthand knowledge and also see the facilities or lack thereof and what needs to be rectified in the region.

Heavy vehicle regulation

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I direct my adjournment matter to the Minister for Emergency Services, the Honourable Jane Garrett. It relates to a specific issue around the Heavy Vehicle National Law — Victoria Class I Emergency Vehicles Operating under State Emergency Response Plan Dimension Exemption (Notice) 2014 (No. 1). It has come to my attention that a constituent in Gippsland has been called upon to use his prime mover, excavator and dozer to access local roads when assisting in firefighting operations — that is, to clear land on certain roads during bushfire conditions. He has been advised that he is not insured under the commonwealth government gazette exemptions and cannot operate on local roads without first receiving an overdimensional permit when using his prime mover.

He needs to access a permit, but the problem is that fires do not understand that permits are not issued on public holidays, including Good Friday, Easter Sunday et cetera, and he is not covered by insurance under those terms. The shires of Wellington and East Gippsland were operating under a trial heavy vehicle gazette until November 2014 due to the large areas of bush within their shires. My constituent, who often works in the City of Latrobe, acknowledges that there is a certain amount of bush area within the Latrobe local government area — and I know those areas too well from Black Saturday, when there were extensive fires in Morwell and south of Morwell at Callignee and Churchill and around Boolarra.

My constituent believes that the City of Latrobe deserves the same exemptions that were in place in East Gippsland and that in fact these gazetted exemptions need to apply across the whole of the state. VicRoads has advised me that it is working on implementing statewide legislation to address this confusion in time for the fire season, but my constituent is asking me, 'Isn't the fire season already upon us?'. He wants to know why the Gippsland region gazette has not been implemented for the Latrobe city area as well.

I ask the minister to implement statewide legislation to immediately address the confusion surrounding overdimensional vehicle access during emergency situations to allow our firefighting volunteers to get on with the job of protecting our properties and lives. It needs an overhaul so that people providing a service during serious firefighting conditions can be insured and go on to do their work correctly and properly whilst being legally covered for any accidents or damage.

City of Brimbank

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Local Government, the Honourable Natalie Hutchins. The issue I raise is important to both the process of democracy and the community of Brimbank.

Following two investigations by the Ombudsman and Local Government Victoria, the former councillors at Brimbank City Council were dismissed as there was serious evidence amounting to an ongoing lack of good governance in the municipality. Local Government Victoria found that councillors fundamentally failed to correct their poor practices and address issues of probity and misconduct, leaving no choice for the future of Brimbank's councillors other than dismissal. Sacking a council is a very serious step and one that the previous Labor government did not take lightly, but for the good of the residents of Brimbank and the process of democracy it was a necessary step to ensure future community development.

Under the administrators the community has prospered. I thank them for their hard work during their time with Brimbank. However, one of the important elements of living in a westernised world is the power of democracy, and next year democracy will once again return to Brimbank. The power will go back into the hands of residents, and they will be able to democratically elect the people they believe will best represent the needs of their community.

The community has been without representation now for six years. This is a significant amount of time, and I am pleased that from next year the community of Brimbank will return to being represented by councillors. This is a very important step, and I ask: can the minister advise what measures have been put in place to ensure that the upcoming Brimbank council election will be a success, and how will the government ensure that the transition from administrators to a democratically elected council in Brimbank will be smooth?

Youth justice facilities

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Families and Children, and I am glad she is in the chamber this evening. As shadow ministers, stakeholders and the community expect us to be accessible and to understand the issues within our respective portfolio areas. The Minister for Families and Children and I, as the minister's shadow, have a number of stakeholders we

need to meet with on a regular basis in relation to the areas of family violence and women's affairs.

One important area that the minister and I, as her shadow, have responsibility for is the area of youth justice. The former government did a considerable amount of work in this important area, including the expansion of the Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre and the highly successful Parkville College education facility, and I have heard very good reports from a number of people within the legal fraternity about the successful outcomes for those young people who have been accessing that education facility.

I have been wanting to visit these facilities to see how they work and operate. I have written to the minister on a number of occasions requesting that a visit to the facilities be facilitated. I wrote to the minister in July and received no response. I wrote to the minister again in August and received an email from the minister's office stating that an attempt would be made to organise a visit to the facilities that would cause the least disruption to the young people and staff at the facilities.

I respect and understand this and I am not questioning it, but there have been a number of issues within the youth facilities lately, including last weekend when there was an outbreak in the Parkville centre. My request is still outstanding. The action I seek from the minister is that the letters and requests that I have continually directed to the minister be acted upon. I find it quite disrespectful that I have not been given the courtesy of receiving a proper response in relation to my request. I am very pleased that the minister is in the chamber tonight to hear my concerns during the adjournment debate, and I look forward to being able to visit both of those facilities.

Responses

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — A number of adjournment matters were raised this evening — by Ms Lovell for the Minister for Education, by Mr Leane for the Minister for Training and Skills, by Mr Purcell for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, by Mr Finn for the Minister for Public Transport, by Ms Pennicuik for the Minister for Education, by Mr Ramsay for the Minister for Public Transport, by Ms Tierney for the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, and by Mr Eideh for the Minister for Local Government — and I will refer all those matters to the relevant ministers.

President, I am seeking your deliberation and some guidance in relation to Ms Bath's matter, so I will hold that over for the present time.

In relation to the matter Ms Crozier raised with me, I understand that my chief of staff has acknowledged Ms Crozier's request to visit the two youth justice facilities. We will be looking at responding to Ms Crozier to make the arrangements for her to visit these facilities. Again, I make the point to Ms Crozier that whilst in opposition I made a similar request of the then Minister for Community Services. In fact I was given the opportunity to visit the Parkville facility on the morning prior to a bill in relation to some matters that related to the youth justice system being debated in this house.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms MIKAKOS — I am continuously getting requests around issues from opposition members that clearly indicate that they are prepared to make of the government a number of requests that they were not prepared to meet when in government, but I am very happy to assure the member that, in relation to the broader issues in relation to the administration of youth justice, these are matters that as the minister I take very seriously. The previous minister disbanded a youth justice round table involving discussions with stakeholders. That is something that I have reinstated.

Ms Crozier interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — In her adjournment the member referred to the issue of engagement with stakeholders. In fact she gave a considerable preamble to her adjournment in relation to this matter. What I am advising the member is that in contrast to the actions of the previous minister — the current Leader of the Opposition in this house — I have reinstated a youth justice round table to engage with the sector.

Mr Finn — On a point of order, President, I listened to Ms Crozier's contribution to the adjournment very carefully and I do not recall any reference to what happened with any previous ministers or any reference to the current Leader of the Opposition. It was a very clear request to the minister, and I think she is well and truly straying now into the area of debate and well away from the matter that was raised with her by Ms Crozier.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Finn is right to a point, but my problem is that there was a lot of interjection and the minister was responding to those interjections. I think there was some provocation in terms of what was being said to the minister, and

therefore I understand why she moved into some of the narrative that she did. I think the minister has completed that answer.

The minister is seeking a ruling on whether Ms Bath's request in the adjournment debate should stand on the basis that it is understood by the Chair and the minister that Ms Bath sought legislation, which is not an action that is allowable in the adjournment debate. I have had a brief conversation with Ms Bath on the matter. I invite the minister to comment on, or perhaps refer to her colleague, a review of the circumstances with regard to the vehicles that were referred to in Ms Bath's adjournment item.

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you, President, for your guidance on this matter. I take it then that the request from the member is slightly different to the way it was expressed, and I will refer the matter to the Minister for Emergency Services with respect to a review of the issues that the member raised around heavy vehicles, rather than the issue of legislation. That concludes the matters that were raised this evening.

I have written responses to adjournment debate matters raised by Mr Morris on 2 September, Ms Lovell and Ms Shing on 6 October, Mr Mulino on 7 October, Mr Eideh and Ms Patten on 20 October, and Mr Leane on 21 October.

Ms Crozier — On a point of order, President, I am just seeking some clarification from you. When you said, 'I think the minister has completed that answer', was that the case in relation to my matter?

The PRESIDENT — Order! Yes.

Ms Crozier — Thank you.

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

House adjourned 7.19 p.m.

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Responses are incorporated in the form provided to Hansard

Cage fighting

Question asked by: Ms Springle
Directed to: Minister for Families and Children
Asked on: 10 November 2015
RESPONSE:

The Commission for Children and Young People is an independent statutory body. The Commission does not require a request from the Minister to comment on such matters.