

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 27 May 2015

(Extract from book 7)

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

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable ALEX CHERNOV, AC, QC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

The ministry

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

Legislative Council committees

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

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

Legislative Council standing committees

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

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

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

Joint committees

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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

President: The Hon. B. N. ATKINSON

Deputy President: Ms G. TIERNEY

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

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
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Fitzherbert, Ms Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred	Western Metropolitan	Greens	Springle, Ms Nina	South Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph	Northern Victoria	ALP	Symes, Ms Jaelyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Young, Mr Daniel	Northern Victoria	SFP
Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP			

¹ Resigned 25 February 2015

² Appointed 15 April 2015

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 27 MAY 2015

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	
<i>Membership</i>	1463
PETITIONS	
<i>Police numbers</i>	1463
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE	
<i>Budget estimates 2015–16</i>	1463
PAPERS	1463
MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
<i>Agricultural exports</i>	1464
<i>Government advertising</i>	1464
<i>Maternal and child health</i>	1465
<i>TAFE Back to Work Fund</i>	1465
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
<i>Western Victoria Region</i>	1466
<i>Banyule Volunteer Awards</i>	1466
<i>Australian Construction Achievement Award</i>	1466
<i>Citizenship ceremonies</i>	1467
<i>National Sorry Day</i>	1467, 1468
<i>Victorian certificate of applied learning awards</i>	1467
<i>SPC Ardmona</i>	1468
<i>Millicent McNeill</i>	1468
<i>Haven Home Safe</i>	1468
<i>Furlong Road, St Albans, level crossing</i>	1469
<i>The Nappy Collective</i>	1469
<i>Croydon Community School</i>	1469
<i>Centre Road, Bentleigh, level crossing</i>	1469
<i>Western Chances</i>	1470
ALCOA (PORTLAND ALUMINIUM SMELTER) (AMENDMENT) ACT AMENDMENT BILL 2015	
<i>Statement of compatibility</i>	1470
<i>Second reading</i>	1470
STANDING COMMITTEES	
<i>References</i>	1471, 1496
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	
<i>Government tendering system</i>	1487
<i>Melbourne–Warrnambool rail services</i>	1488
<i>Western distributor</i>	1488, 1489
<i>Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade</i>	1489, 1490
<i>Workplace bullying</i>	1490
<i>SPC Ardmona</i>	1491
<i>Election commitments</i>	1491, 1492
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE	
<i>Answers</i>	1493
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
<i>Northern Victoria Region</i>	1493, 1495
<i>Western Victoria Region</i>	1494, 1495
<i>South Eastern Metropolitan Region</i>	1494
<i>Northern Metropolitan Region</i>	1494
<i>Eastern Metropolitan Region</i>	1494, 1495
<i>Eastern Victoria Region</i>	1495
<i>Western Metropolitan Region</i>	1496
STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE	
<i>Reference</i>	1515

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

<i>Auditor-General: Palliative Care</i>	1520, 1526
<i>Auditor-General: Occupational Violence against Healthcare Workers</i>	1521, 1522, 1523
<i>Deakin University: report 2014</i>	1523
<i>Auditor-General: Additional School Costs for Families</i>	1524, 1525

ADJOURNMENT

<i>Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE</i>	1526
<i>Furlong Road, St Albans, level crossing</i>	1527
<i>Challenge Family Violence</i>	1527
<i>Victorian Racing Industry Fund</i>	1528
<i>Commercial netting fishing licences</i>	1528
<i>Retirement housing sector</i>	1529
<i>Geelong planning authority</i>	1529
<i>Emerald Secondary College</i>	1530
<i>Autism services</i>	1530
<i>Southland railway station</i>	1531
<i>Sports funding</i>	1531
<i>Box Hill Institute</i>	1532
<i>City of Stonnington public transport</i>	1532
<i>Responses</i>	1532

Wednesday, 27 May 2015

The **PRESIDENT** (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 9.36 a.m. and read the prayer.

**ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES
AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE**

Membership

The **PRESIDENT** — Order! I advise the Legislative Council that I am in receipt of correspondence from Brad Battin, the member for Gembrook in the other place, which states:

I wish to inform you of my resignation from the environment and natural resources committee.

This is effective immediately.

I will discuss with the chairperson the resignation and trust they will continue their work to investigate matters in terms of the reference for CFA and Fiskville.

We assume that the Legislative Assembly will appoint a new person to Mr Battin's position on that committee.

PETITIONS

Following petition presented to house:

Police numbers

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that Premier Daniel Andrews has failed to commit to providing additional police numbers and subsequently, as Victoria's population grows, the number of police per capita goes backwards under Labor every day.

The petitioners therefore respectfully request that the Legislative Council of Victoria calls on the Andrews Labor Government to commit to providing additional frontline police numbers as a matter of priority.

**By Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria)
(21 signatures).**

Laid on table.

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES
COMMITTEE**

Budget estimates 2015–16

Ms **SHING** (Eastern Victoria) presented hearings alert report, together with appendices.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be published.

The **PRESIDENT** — Order! Ms Shingle.

Honourable members interjecting.

The **PRESIDENT** — Order! Can I explain? The member asked me to do that, and it was on the top of my mind and that is why I got caught.

Ms **SHING** (Eastern Victoria) — I appreciate the President's indulgence in our cementing forevermore what I hope will be a friendly nickname. I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

To that end, I state that the report contains details of the 55 hours of hearings which were conducted by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for the period to 22 May inclusive, and which involved an extensive discussion with various ministers and departmental representatives about the budget and the forward estimates period. I am grateful for the President's attention in this matter, and also for giving me my new name.

Motion agreed to.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on —

Early Intervention Services for Vulnerable Children and Families, May 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Universities: 2014 Audit Snapshot, May 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Boroondara Planning Scheme — Amendment C215.

Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton and Wyndham Planning Schemes — Amendment GC26.

Casey Planning Scheme — Amendment C193 (Part 2).

Corangamite Planning Scheme — Amendment C40.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — Amendments C266 (Part 2) and C309.

Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme — Amendment C171.

Hindmarsh Planning Scheme — Amendment C15.

Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme — Amendment C93.

Maribyrnong Planning Scheme — Amendment C136.

Moonee Valley Planning Scheme — Amendment C139.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme — Amendment C184 (Part 1).

Mount Alexander Planning Scheme — Amendment C72.

Nillumbik Planning Scheme — Amendment C105.

Stonnington Planning Scheme — Amendment C204.

Warmambool Planning Scheme — Amendment C199.

Whitehorse Planning Scheme — Amendments C159 and C173.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendment C133.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Agricultural exports

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I rise to inform the house of a new initiative that the government is taking. It follows the recent meeting of the agriculture ministers forum, AGMIN, in Sydney on Friday. The Andrews government will lead a pilot program to improve market access for temperate fruit exports to China and Thailand. Such fruits include apples, pears, stone fruits, grapes and cherries. At this meeting the pilot program was agreed to by my colleagues, including the federal Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, and other state and territory agriculture ministers. This follows calls from industry for more to be done to support Victorian horticulture producers, improve access to new markets and overcome barriers to trade. These can be complex matters that can have a detrimental effect on growers, most notably those who are part of our table grape industry in the northern part of the state.

Victoria's \$2.4 billion horticulture industry employs more than 9000 people and accounts for more than half of Australia's horticulture exports, which are worth \$894 million. This program is in addition to the \$5.2 million provided in the state budget to establish a specialised trade unit to support trade negotiation and remove trade barriers.

The AGMIN forum also endorsed a strategy to boost agricultural export opportunities, with a focus on driving positive outcomes and promoting Australia as a professional, organised and reliable trading partner.

Government advertising

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — My ministers statement today is about a commitment made by the Andrews government at the last election to reduce advertising, which is reflected in budget paper 3, page 105, which indicates that our government is reducing expenditure on TV advertising by \$38 million. Part of my responsibility will be to try to ensure that we deliver that budget saving. Also part of my responsibility is to make sure that there is a streamlined process for the way in which decisions are made about the way advertising campaigns are undertaken. There will be a degree of responsibility —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JENNINGS — Very importantly I make a commitment to the community that we will not waste taxpayers money. We will not embark upon political advertising where spin is a feature of the day. If members are concerned about the way a proper evaluation of advertising should be undertaken, I encourage them to have a look at a document entitled *Moving Victoria Campaign Evaluation*, which was prepared by Hall & Partners for the previous government and is now available to this government. I seek leave to table this document, and if I do not get leave to make it available, I will volunteer to make it available.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ministers statements have a very brief time frame. I am of the view that these statements involve new initiatives by the government and that the house ought to be interested in those matters that are brought by ministers to the house. Incessant interjections are not helpful to a situation where the house is being informed, and it has gone over the odds during this particular contribution. The minister is trying to help the house and is making available a document for members who might be further interested in this matter, and we need to ensure that the contribution is heard in silence.

Mr Drum — On a point of order, President, is it a new initiative for a minister to talk about what a previous government did with its respective documents?

Mr JENNINGS — I am explaining how it is used.

Mr Drum — No, the minister is talking about tabling something about what the previous government did. It has nothing to do with a new ministerial initiative.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It is quite in order for the minister to make available a document for members to understand the context of this initiative. I do not believe the minister commented per se on what the previous government did or did not do. The minister is providing an evaluation paper, and that is in order.

Mr JENNINGS — Thank you, President, for your support, because it is appropriate that governments evaluate the effectiveness of advertising and the effects it has and place limits around the political nature of advertising. The document I am prepared to make available to all members of this chamber clearly demonstrates the ineffective nature of a \$15 million program instigated by the previous government. It will not be replicated by this government, because we will not allow this type of advertising to take place in the future.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister is making available that document to members, so they might approach him if they wish to have a copy.

Maternal and child health

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to inform the house of the government's recent initiatives regarding the maternal and child health sector. The Andrews Labor government is committed to delivering services that ensure that all Victorians, especially our most vulnerable and disadvantaged families and children, are supported to participate fully and succeed in life. Maternal and child health services are the first community-based services that most families access post-birth. They are a vital first stage in the continuum of services.

The Andrews Labor government knows that innovation drives long-term, sustainable improvement in productivity and quality in service delivery. For this reason the government has established the Victorian Maternal and Child Health Service Innovation Fund to foster innovation in the sector, with a particular focus on innovation that will support vulnerable children and families.

We also want to establish a more collaborative partnership between government and the sector to build our vision for the maternal and child health service of the future. For this reason we have established a new

Victorian maternal and child health service advisory group and a new Victorian principal maternal and child health nurse position within the Department of Education and Training. The advice and input of these experts from the sector will be invaluable in years to come.

Finally, we want to encourage our maternal and child health staff to enhance their professional qualifications. This is why last week I announced the establishment of the Carol Friday Scholarship for Maternal and Child Health Nursing Excellence to honour the legacy of Carol Friday. Carol Friday was a great advocate and champion of the maternal and child health profession. Her colleagues remember her for her high level of commitment and dedication to supporting the most vulnerable in the community. Her work was an example of the individual excellence and high personal performance that makes our Victorian maternal and child health service so great.

The maternal and child health service is at the leading edge of our efforts as a state to intervene early to address disadvantage at its source, and I am committed to ensuring that Victoria stays at the forefront of practice in maternal and child health.

TAFE Back to Work Fund

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I am pleased to advise the house on further developments regarding the Andrews government's \$50 million TAFE Back to Work Fund, a fund that will support the government's *Back to Work* plan to create 100 000 jobs and get people back to work. The plan is also part of our agenda to strengthen TAFEs right across Victoria in order to improve their capacity to meet industry needs. The plan for the \$50 million fund is to support TAFEs in building capability and partnerships with businesses and industry, including those in the six growth sectors of the economy identified in the *Back to Work* plan, which are medical technology and pharmaceuticals; new energy technology; food and fibre; transport, defence, construction technology; international education; and professional services.

The call for applications began on 24 March 2015, and I am pleased to inform the house that we have received 41 applications from TAFE and dual sector institutes totalling around \$107 million. There is great enthusiasm for this fund and some great programs have been put forward. Those programs are being assessed by the department right now in terms of the benefits they can bring to local economies and communities right across Victoria and how they can partner with

local industries that need to strengthen their skill bases to develop their capacity to strengthen the Victorian economy. I am pleased that I will shortly be announcing the successful projects. They will make quite a difference to both our TAFEs and the capacity of our industries to compete to service the Victorian economy in the future.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I would like to inform the chamber of the activities I was involved in last week as a representative of Western Victoria Region. On Monday I attended the Botanica Springs Children's and Community Centre opening in Brookfield. The coalition government provided \$1.5 million towards this \$6.2 million project. It was great to be there with the mayor of the City of Melton, Sophie Ramsay, whose council provided \$4.7 million for the centre, and Don Nardella, the member for Melton in the Assembly, who graciously acknowledged the investment by the Napthine government in that project.

I also attended the opening of the Norlane Child and Family Centre, which received \$1.5 million from the coalition government and \$3.7 million from the City of Greater Geelong. I congratulate Sue Down on her work in preparing the documentation for the application for that assistance. I also congratulate the then minister, Wendy Lovell, and her department, which helped to fund many of the centres I am talking about. Unfortunately the Minister for Tourism and Major Events and Assembly member for Lara, John Eren, was not so gracious as to acknowledge the coalition's contribution. In fact, he said it was an Andrews government contribution, which is typical.

Epworth Geelong was another recipient of investment from the coalition government when \$2.85 million was provided through the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund for stage 1 of that hospital. It was great to be with federal Minister for Health, Sussan Ley, and the former state Minister for Health, David Davis, in Geelong last week to see the topping out. I also thank project manager Tanya Moscicki, who was there providing advice.

I was also at the launch of the Geelong Tertiary Futures Program, as was the Minister for Training and Skills, Steve Herbert. The coalition invested \$11 million in Skilling the Bay. We are seeing some great outcomes from that investment —

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

Banyule Volunteer Awards

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — In celebration of National Volunteer Week I had the great pleasure of attending the Banyule Volunteer Awards night on 14 May in Ivanhoe, along with my colleagues Ms Dunn and Mr Dalla-Riva. It was a gala dinner dance. National Volunteer Week celebrates the millions of hardworking Australians who selflessly dedicate their time to furthering the work of an enormous range of organisations. I would like to acknowledge everyone who volunteers in Banyule, but I would like to particularly celebrate those winners who were announced on the night. Citizen of the Year is the wonderful Maria Welsh, who seems to volunteer for absolutely everything, from palliative care to bereavement and helping the young and disadvantaged.

The Individual Volunteer Award went to Joan Vandenberg in a tight competition between her and her husband, Tony, who won the highly commended award. The Young Volunteer Award winner was Amy Bryans. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Volunteer Award went to Gayle Charlton. The Multicultural Community Volunteer winner was Dr Hussein Haraco. The Community Group Volunteer Award went to: Banksia Palliative Care Service, Heidelcare and the Olympic Village Exodus Community drop-in team. Good neighbour awards went to Graham Lawson and Jen Nieuwenhuizen.

I would like to congratulate them all, particularly Beryl from the Children's Protection Society Op Shop. She was not only great but she was also my dance partner for the evening.

Australian Construction Achievement Award

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to make a members statement in relation to the 2015 Australian Construction Achievement Award. Last week I was fortunate to be in attendance at the presentation of that award. The winning project was the regional rail link. All Victorians should be proud of the fact that Victoria has won 7 of the last 10 Australian construction awards, which is an amazing achievement for a single state out of eight jurisdictions. This continues a long winning run for the state.

The regional rail link project involves the removal of a number of level crossings, a significant increase in rail capacity heading into the city and a significant improvement in access to the city for people from

regional Victoria, particularly those from Geelong. The project was up against a number of other impressive projects in other states, including major infrastructure projects such as the largest ever publicly funded hospital in Western Australia and a major pipeline project in Queensland. It was very gratifying to be able to hand that award to people who constructed a project in our state.

I might say again that this win follows six other Victorian wins over the past decade. I congratulate the winners of that award, and I hope we continue to perform strongly in the infrastructure and construction space over the coming decade.

Citizenship ceremonies

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to draw members' attention to citizenship ceremonies and the important role of local government in those ceremonies. I have had the pleasure of participating in many citizenship ceremonies over the past nine years as a councillor in the Shire of Yarra Ranges and in the last six months as a member of Parliament. I have witnessed the joy and inspiration of hundreds of new Australian citizens and their families celebrating a milestone moment for the new citizens, their families and the local community. The vibrancy of multicultural Australia that we are proud of is on full display.

These events can be quite moving when you understand the stories of hardship, isolation and struggle that accompany many new citizens, and the unbridled excitement and joy of becoming a fully legal citizen and truly belonging to your local community in Victoria.

These events are organised by local councils, which receive no funding from state or federal governments to deliver such special events. The events are part of a range of services provided by local government across Victoria for which it receives little public recognition. Indeed local government is more often under attack. It is too often blamed for increasing council rates and charges when it is, in most cases, struggling to respond to community needs that are not being met by state and federal governments.

I thank local government for being at the front line of providing increasing levels of essential services to the community. There are many local government services at risk. I hope that members here understand the important role that local government plays.

Citizenship ceremonies

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to endorse some of Ms Dunn's comments, especially the ones about citizenship. I must say this is one responsibility that I take very seriously, remembering my own taking of Australian citizenship when I was 17 years of age.

However, it is my understanding that local government does receive some commonwealth funding in order to conduct those ceremonies. I just want to place that on the record. What is good about those events is that all levels of government participate and that those ceremonies are intended to be conducted in an impartial and secular way. They are certainly a celebration of a major milestone.

National Sorry Day

Mrs PEULICH — Yesterday was National Sorry Day, a significant day, and the start of a special week for Indigenous people throughout Australia. Across the country many community events mark National Sorry Day. It is followed by National Reconciliation Week, which is celebrated from 27 May to 3 June. This is an important time in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and provides the community with an opportunity to not only reflect on the impacts of their history but also celebrate the enormous contribution of Indigenous people to the fabric of this country. It is a time to reflect and focus on how Australians can better recognise each other and the contributions, culture and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I congratulate the many organisations, including the National Sorry Day Committee, and the many individuals who organise events which play a vital role in bringing communities together for this very special occasion.

Victorian certificate of applied learning awards

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to congratulate Ms Lyn Maniz, a Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL) teacher at Ballarat Secondary College, on winning the VCAL Teacher of the Year award. Ms Maniz was humble in receiving her award, thanking her colleagues at the college. She did, however, say that it was a huge honour and the highlight of her career.

Over 23 000 Victorian students take part in the VCAL every year, and it is teachers like Ms Maniz who make VCAL such a successful program. It has been a tough

couple of years, with the Baillieu government ripping \$48 million out of the program in 2012. The teachers and schools that support the VCAL program rose to this unneeded challenge admirably. A school in my electorate, Bellarine Secondary College, even went into deficit rather than disadvantage its students. When asked about her teaching style, Ms Maniz said it was all about the relationship built with the students.

I would also like to congratulate Mr Liam Price of Hopetoun P-12 College on winning the integrated program teacher award. The integrated program brings together the many strands of VCAL, including literacy and numeracy, work-related skills, personal development skills and industry-specific skills. This reflects the integration of skills that often occurs outside the school curriculum, in everyday life and the workplace. Teachers like Mr Price who go the extra yard make a difference and will be the driving force behind making Victoria the education state.

National Sorry Day

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to join with many of my parliamentary colleagues this week in marking National Reconciliation Week and National Sorry Day yesterday, an important day to remember the past policies of forced child removal that resulted in the stolen generations. The *Bringing Them Home* report was tabled in the federal Parliament on 26 May 1997 and revealed a painful chapter in Australia's history. It contained a variety of recommendations, including that National Sorry Day be commemorated each year, and since then National Sorry Day commemorations have acted to raise awareness about the significance of the forcible removal policies and have contributed to an important process of healing.

I was sorry yesterday to have missed the annual luncheon that is held by the Port Phillip Citizens for Reconciliation, which I usually attend, and I pay tribute to the work the group has done in this area over the years.

On National Sorry Day we should recommit to increasing our efforts to ensure that governments fully deliver on the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report. There is a lot of unfinished business and much work to do to make sure that gaps in health, education, employment and life expectancy are closed. There is still no compensation or reparation scheme in place, and we continue to call for such a scheme.

The Greens are concerned about the increasing and disproportionate number of Aboriginal children going

into out-of-home care and have initiated a Senate inquiry into the issue, which Greens Senator Rachel Siewert is chairing. This inquiry should help to establish how best to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care and how we should work to prevent it.

Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which the great majority of the Australian people support, is also of great importance both symbolically and practically for all of us, and I hope to see this achieved by 2017.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I indicate that we have some badges for Reconciliation Week on Natalie Tyler's desk just at the rear of the chamber. Members are encouraged to wear a badge if they feel they wish to mark this important week.

SPC Ardmona

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — The Premier, Daniel Andrews, last week opened the new SPC Ardmona snack pack line, which was made possible through the coalition government's \$22 million investment in saving SPC. I would like to congratulate and thank former Premier Denis Napthine, the member for South-West Coast in the Assembly, for the funding that allowed SPC to begin its modernisation and renewal, which was championed by me, the federal member for Murray, Sharman Stone, and the former member for Shepparton in the Assembly, Jeanette Powell.

Millicent McNeill

Ms LOVELL — I congratulate a constituent, Shepparton's Millicent McNeill, on her recent Red Cross honorary life membership award. Mrs McNeill is the current chair of the Shepparton Red Cross branch and of Hume zone 9, and has devoted 27 years of her life to the organisation in a variety of roles. Mrs McNeill is a remarkable person, and I am proud to have people like her in my electorate.

Haven Home Safe

Ms LOVELL — Last Friday evening I had the pleasure of attending Haven Home Safe's 10th anniversary celebrations in Bendigo. Haven was Victoria's first registered affordable housing association, and I am thrilled to have had a close working relationship with it both as a local member and when I was the Minister for Housing. I look forward to continuing to work with Haven on its mission and congratulate it on this milestone.

Furlong Road, St Albans, level crossing

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on an important issue affecting many of my constituents, the Furlong Road level crossing in St Albans. I was delighted to join the member for St Albans in the Assembly, Natalie Suleyman, and some of my constituents at Ginifer railway station last Tuesday to confirm the removal of the Furlong Road level crossing. My constituents and I were pleased to hear that this crossing is part of the commitment to remove 17 of our state's most dangerous level crossings by 2018.

This is not the first time I have spoken about this level crossing, and for some time it seemed that this particular crossing was being ignored. My constituents have been campaigning for the removal of this level crossing for many years, and I am pleased to be able to say that it is now closer than ever. This project, like the nearby Main Road level crossing removal project, will deliver many benefits to the St Albans community, including improved safety for vehicles and pedestrians, as well as reduced congestion and more timely train services.

These two rail crossings were listed as being among the five worst rail crossings in our state. Over the years we have witnessed many innocent lives lost at these crossings. The removal of these crossings is absolutely crucial to the proper functioning of our community, and I commend the Andrews Labor government on its investment of \$2.4 billion in the 2015–16 budget, which includes the removal by 2018 of not just these two dangerous level crossings in my electorate but 1 level crossings across Melbourne.

The Nappy Collective

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — Last week I had the opportunity to meet the founder of an organisation I have admired from afar for some time. Sandra Jacobs is the founder and one of the five Melbourne board members of The Nappy Collective. It is a great organisation based on a simple and practical idea. As many of us in this place know, a baby will grow out of its nappies seemingly overnight, leaving you with a half-empty packet of nappies that cannot be used. Sandra Jacobs had the brilliant idea to collect these leftover nappies and give them to women in need, in particular those who are homeless and who in many cases have become so because they were escaping domestic violence.

Since starting in 2013, The Nappy Collective has collected more than 226 000 nappies. It is in 16 towns

and cities across Australia and helps a variety of women at the time when they need it most. It collects nappies twice a year, in May and October. The figure of 226 000 I just gave does not include those nappies that have been collected in recent weeks. I commend The Nappy Collective's work and look forward to supporting its good work in the future.

Croydon Community School

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I was very fortunate to attend an event organised by Croydon Community School — a school I am sure you know of as well, President — which does great work. At this event senior students signed a pledge that at the end of the year they will be in school, in training or in a full-time job. This is a big commitment because these are students who do it quite tough. They have found their way to this school after leaving or being expelled from a number of other schools across the east, a vast geographical area. This is a great commitment by these young people. Croydon Community School does a fantastic job. The staff's patience is amazing to the point where if it takes a young person three years to get through year 10, it takes three years, and they get them through it and make sure that these young people are employable when they exit Croydon Community School. I am convinced that this type of school has saved young people's lives, and I think it deserves all the credit and support we can direct to it.

Centre Road, Bentleigh, level crossing

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — While the announcement by the Premier Daniel Andrews to remove the Centre Road, Bentleigh, level crossing is welcomed, it will be a hollow promise until proper funding has been allocated. While the Premier may have promised to remove the Centre Road crossing, the \$2.5 billion allocated to crossing removals does not exist, as it is dependent upon the sale of the port of Melbourne.

This morning we heard the government making more announcements about the removal of level crossings on the Cranbourne-Pakenham line, with vague dates and what appears to be a rushed and panicked process so that it can meet its election promise of removing 50 level crossings. But questions remain about how this will be paid for and how the disruption it will cause will be managed. In Bentleigh the public is still unaware of when construction on the Centre Road level crossing will begin, how long construction will take and what impact the construction work will have.

The success of the traders on Centre Road is contingent on traffic flows and the availability of parking, yet there have been no community forums to discuss these issues. Premier Daniel Andrews has not released a credible plan to minimise interruptions caused by the crossing removal. Questions such as whether the car park adjacent to the station will be closed during the construction phase and what transport arrangements will be in place once the line is closed need to be answered. The people of Bentleigh deserve better than this, and all Victorians need to understand how these level crossings will be paid for. The budget papers clearly state that all capital funding for level crossing removals beyond 1 July 2015 is to be confirmed and highlight that the only level crossings which have been actually funded are those that were funded by the coalition.

Western Chances

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — On Wednesday, 22 April, I had the pleasure of attending, along with various other government MPs, the Western Chances scholarship award night. Founding chair Terry Bracks awarded scholarships to 92 recipients that night. Western Chances is an organisation based in the western suburbs that assists young people in getting through their schooling. Since 2004 Western Chances has invested \$3.4 million in supporting young people, with 2100 young people assisted and 4000 scholarships awarded. The scholarships support motivated young people who have an obvious talent and who might not otherwise have an opportunity to pursue the education of their dreams. They do a wonderful job.

On selection criteria, principals, teachers, student welfare coordinators and career guidance counsellors identify these kids and nominate them for awards. In a testimonial from one of them, Thanh, a year 12 student, said:

Western Chances is up there with my family. I wanted to get into medicine and I didn't think I could make it. My family is completely stoked!

There are many other testimonials from various students. I commend the founding chair of Western Chances, Terry Bracks, and her board on the wonderful work they do in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

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

Statement of compatibility

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (charter act), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Alcoa (Portland Aluminium Smelter) Bill 2015.

In my opinion, the Alcoa (Portland Aluminium Smelter) Bill 2015 as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The purpose of the bill is to repeal section 14 of the Alcoa (Portland Aluminium Smelter) Amendment Act 1984, which would have the effect of removing special exemptions to Freedom of Information law for matters affecting or relating to the Alcoa smelters at Portland and Port Henry.

Human rights issues

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

Freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the charter act provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. The right to receive and impart information and ideas under section 15(2) of the charter act has been held to create a positive obligation on government to give access to government-held documents (freedom of information) (*XYZ v. Victoria Police (General)* [2010] VCAT 255).

The freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas is enhanced by the bill, as it removes barriers to accessing information.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Greg Barber, MP

Second reading

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

This is a very straightforward bill. It removes from our freedom of information laws an exemption which, to the extent that it was ever necessary, no longer has any legitimate purpose.

Section 14 of the Alcoa (Portland Aluminium Smelter) (Amendment) Act 1984 exempts from the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 any document relating to the 'operation or carrying-on of the smelter site or anything done or to be done on or in relation to the smelter site'.

The exemption arose out of the agreements between the Victorian government and Alcoa to continue construction of the Portland aluminium smelter in 1984.

The Premier of Victoria at the time, Mr Cain, was concerned about trade secrets of Alcoa and other parties, which, he said during the debate:

could not be made public without commercial disadvantages to the bodies involved.¹

The exemption was aimed squarely at commercially sensitive documents.

It was created, he said, so that:

companies that signed heads of agreement and other prospective participants in the joint venture will accordingly be reassured that information about trade secrets and documents of a sensitive commercial nature will be declared to have clear exempt status for freedom of information purposes.

Mr Cain went on to describe the amount of information that had already been made public by the government with the support of Alcoa, pursuant to:

commitment to open and frank disclosure within sensible commercial limits.

Removal of section 14 will not harm Alcoa's commercial interests.

Any of the documents under the original 1984 agreements, or any new documents containing commercially sensitive information, would be covered by the exemption under section 34 of the Freedom of Information Act 1982, which states:

34 Documents relating to trade secrets etc.

- (1) A document is an exempt document if its disclosure under this Act would disclose information acquired by an agency or a Minister from a business, commercial or financial undertaking and the information relates to —²
 - (a) trade secrets; or
 - (b) other matters of a business, commercial or financial nature and the disclosure of the information would be likely to expose the undertaking unreasonably to disadvantage.

In August 2014, the Alcoa aluminium smelter at Point Henry, Geelong, ceased operations. In May 2015, the company announced it would soon cease operations at the Anglesea mine and power station. In October this year, the historical electricity subsidy paid to the Portland smelter will expire.

The public interest is now in the plans for decommissioning and rehabilitation of the Anglesea and Point Henry sites. There can be no further justification for a special exemption for this particular set of facilities.

This provision is unnecessary today and should be removed, to bring Alcoa's operations and interactions with government under the same freedom of information regime as every other commercial enterprise in Victoria.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 10 June.

STANDING COMMITTEES

References

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to move:

That pursuant to sessional order 6 this house requires the following matters to be referred to the Council standing committee specified —

- (1) to the economy and infrastructure committee to inquire into, consider and report, at least once every six months, on public sector infrastructure and public works projects, including current and past infrastructure projects and proposals and, in particular —
 - (a) projects relating to the removal of railway level crossings;
 - (b) the western distributor;
 - (c) the Melbourne Metro rail project;
 - (d) the sale/lease of port of Melbourne; and
 - (e) Melbourne Airport rail link;

and any other public sector infrastructure or public works projects the committee determines appropriate;

- (2) to the environment and planning committee as part of its oversight of local government Victoria, to inquire into and report every six months on the outcome of the state government policy of local government rate capping on

¹ Hansard, Legislative Assembly, 6 September 1984 (p.172)

² S. 34(1) substituted by No. 57/1999 s. 7(1).

councils' viability, service impacts on local communities and impacts on the provision of local infrastructure; and

- (3) to the legal and social issues committee, to inquire into, consider and provide an interim report no later than 30 November 2015 and a final report no later than 1 May 2016, on the process, cost and effectiveness of the Victorian government departmental restructure (machinery of government changes) following the November 2014 election.

The motion refers a number of matters to various Council standing committees. I take the opportunity to go through each of those references to briefly outline some of the logic and the approach we are taking. There is no doubt that the upper house committees are poised to do very important work for this chamber and for the Parliament and the people of Victoria. We have had debates both yesterday and in previous weeks on some of the references for those committees. It is good to see there are references coming from the government, the opposition, the crossbenches and the Greens party, so each may be able to pursue matters that are important for both the scrutiny and transparency of the government and for progress on important social and policy issues for the Victorian community.

The first reference says:

to the economy and infrastructure committee to inquire into, consider and report at least once every six months, on public sector infrastructure and public works projects, including current and past infrastructure projects and proposals.

It goes on to list a number of projects in detail, such as:

projects relating to the removal of railway level crossings, the western distributor, the Melbourne Metro rail project, the sale/lease of the port of Melbourne, the Melbourne Airport rail link and any other projects the committee determines appropriate.

The coalition believes Victoria needs new roads, new rail and a new port to cope with and deal with the pressure on our infrastructure, to address the growth of Melbourne and Victoria as a community and to make sure that the infrastructure meets the needs of all Victorians, both now and into the future.

The motion outlines projects that are slated in relation to each of those areas. We think it would be valuable for the committee to have the capacity to look in detail at these infrastructure projects. A number of questions have already been raised about these projects, which will enable the committee to go into a bit more detail and to have the capacity to question the public service and seek input from the broader Victorian community. That can happen in a very engaged way.

As I have said, some questions have already been raised about some of these issues, such as the capacity to achieve the railway level crossings commitment that has been made by the government and the process by which that will be determined, such as which level crossings are done and the rollout of how that occurs. In relation to the western distributor, at the moment the proposal is that the state government will not contribute a cent to that initiative, and of course there are some substantial questions about the route and whether the project actually addresses the volume of traffic that needs to be addressed not only now but also 5, 10, 20 and 30 years in the future.

Of course there are questions in relation to the port of Melbourne, and I know we will see some legislation in relation to that from the government. That has been committed to and outlined, but there are questions about the details of what level of funding will be achieved, and then of course there is the linkage of that back into the railway level crossings. Funding has been committed to deliver that project, but will that funding cover the very significant cost of the railway level crossings removal plan?

It is a very significant and important reference for this valuable upper house committee to be able to look at the progress of the infrastructure agenda of the government and report back to the Parliament on an ongoing basis about how those initiatives are progressing. If concerns are raised or if there are funding issues, this enables both the Parliament and the Victorian public to have transparency in relation to those infrastructure commitments, which form a very significant part of the Victorian budget, although there is less from the current Victorian government than was committed to by the coalition government.

The second reference requires the environment and planning committee:

as part of its oversight of Local Government Victoria, to inquire into and report every six months on the outcome of the state government policy of local government rate capping on councils' viability, service impacts on local communities and impacts on the provision of local infrastructure ...

Once again we acknowledge that this was an election commitment of the government, but serious and significant concerns are already being raised about the impact of rate capping on municipalities right across the state. In rural and regional Victoria, where many of us have been in recent times, there have been some very significant concerns, especially from some of the smaller councils, about the rate-capping policy and the capacity of local councils to deliver the services and local infrastructure that they have in the past been able

to deliver. We are talking about things such as maternal and child health, weed removal, small business grants and of course very significant infrastructure.

I was pleased just recently to be in the Assembly electorate of Ivanhoe, where the mayor of Banyule was opening a new swimming complex. Six million dollars had been contributed by the council to redevelop the Ivanhoe aquatic centre. While celebrating the opening of the new centre the mayor said that he had a very significant concern about whether his council and councils across the state would have the capacity to invest in such vital community infrastructure in the future because of the impact of the rate-capping policies of the Labor government.

Once again, we think that the six-month rolling reporting mechanism would allow the Parliament and the people of Victoria to have ongoing information, advice and understanding of the decisions being made as a result of the rate-capping policy, including an understanding of potentially how exemptions are being determined, how that flows down to councils, what funding they have available and therefore what services and infrastructure are being delivered into local communities. This is a very valuable reference, which allows important work to be done.

The third reference is:

to the Legal and Social Issues Committee, to inquire into, consider and provide an interim report no later than 30 November 2015 and a final report no later than 1 May 2016, on the process, cost and effectiveness of the Victorian government departmental restructure (machinery of government changes) ...

as a result of the November 2014 election outcome. Very significant changes have been made. Any government has a right to make a determination about the structure of the public sector that supports it, but it is also an appropriate role for the upper house Legal and Social Issues Committee to be able to scrutinise what is being achieved. Have the aspirations of the machinery of government changes been translated into an effective transition merger and restructuring of the public sector? Is it delivering improved outcomes in terms of the effectiveness of those departments? What has been the cost of the restructure?

There have been some comments that there has been no cost for the restructure. We know that is absolutely not the case, even it is a matter of new logos or new letterhead. There are always costs involved in moving government departments or areas to other buildings and facilities. There are always costs associated with these changes. But the costs are not only financial; the costs can also be time, focus and collaboration. A lot of the

feedback I get is about the capacity of the community to access, communicate and consult with public servants when a lot of positions are changing or unfilled, and many of those relationships have changed.

I will outline some of the changes in the Victorian public sector. Overall, the big picture is that from 1 January this year it went from nine departments back to seven. Concerns have been raised that these departments can sometimes become megadepartments. Is the span of control or policy responsibility too big? Has the vision been realised? One change is the prevention of family violence unit moving from the former Department of Human Services to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Once again, this was a physical move. Is that translating to a whole-of-government perspective, given that the department itself has very little funding and is very small when the funding and influence sits primarily back with health and human services but across other departments as well?

The new Infrastructure Victoria and Projects Victoria come under the Department of Premier and Cabinet. There has been some funding for the establishment of these new bodies, but have they been established, and when underway, will these bodies fulfil the objectives they were set up to fulfil?

There is the new super Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources. One of the biggest challenges for both parliamentarians and public servants with these changes is to get the new acronyms and the lingo right. Not only is its title quite a mouthful but it covers public transport; agriculture; creative industries; employment; energy and resources; industry; ports; regional development; roads and road safety; small business, innovation and trade; and tourism and major events. That is quite a lot sitting in the one area.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning splits up what had been a very significant piece of work — the merging of the environment and agriculture portfolios. It would be good to have the capacity to look at whether that has led to better or more challenging decision-making.

The one that is directly relevant to my portfolio area is the remerging of the departments of health and human services. It is interesting that it was the current Premier, Daniel Andrews, who as Minister for Health led the split of the Department of Human Services into the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services back in 2008.

As minister responsible, I have to say that those departments spent the first couple of years under the former Labor government justifying and talking about the time before the split. The cultural change took some time, and interestingly the feedback that I had had is that the collaboration across two departments was significantly improved when there was just one department, because that collaboration had not been occurring to the extent that it needed to. Now that the departments are back together once again, have the benefits and changes been realised?

At a very practical level, one of the things that we found interesting as a result of that megadepartment was that it hid a lot of the costs. We undertook base reviews for things like child protection, which identified some of the genuine costs that had previously been hidden by the fact that there was a very large megadepartment that could transfer costs within the department to cover gaps here or holes there. There are benefits from having a genuine understanding of the cost of running these services, and today we have got some further advice from the Auditor-General on the early intervention services for families. Can those benefits of genuinely understanding the costs of running those services be maintained with the departments being merged again?

Three references to our three upper house committees are proposed by this motion. We think these would be valuable discussions that would lead to important information that could be prosecuted by the committees, once again fulfilling the role of the committee as having a genuine capacity to engage, scrutinise, enhance transparency and improve decision-making in relation to the policies and programs of the Labor government. I commend this motion to the house, and I hope we have the opportunity to progress these vital matters.

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — From the outset I make it clear that the government will be opposing this motion and opposing each of the individual components of the motion, and I will take some time to work through each of the individual components to make it clear why the government is opposing it.

At the outset I stress that government members are not opposing this motion because we are trying to avoid transparency or because we are trying to reduce accountability. We are opposing this motion because we think it is an inappropriate mechanism for transparency and accountability. We believe that there are already existing and better mechanisms for transparency and accountability. To be honest, if we are talking about transparency, we think this is a pretty

transparent and inefficient fishing expedition that will result in a reduction in the effectiveness of the standing committees involved.

The first point I will make about the first two references is that they are both open-ended and unlimited in scope and time, which is not a good precedent to set. I would argue that it is very poor governance for standing committees to be given references that set up an open-ended process that allows the committees to go off on fishing expeditions with vague terms of reference. Let us look at the wording of the first reference. It is 'to inquire into, consider and report' on major infrastructure projects. That is very vague wording. What does it mean to 'consider' a major infrastructure project? I understand what 'consider' means, but 'consider' provides no guidance to the standing committee on what it is that the committee should be looking into.

In Victoria the processes for examining major infrastructure projects has been too ad hoc and too vague for too long. That is why my party went to the last election promising that it would establish Infrastructure Victoria, a proposal that was widely supported by stakeholders throughout the infrastructure community and throughout the public policy community, and I believe it is supported by the opposition. One of the major reasons we need a body such as Infrastructure Victoria is to bring together expertise for the evaluation of major infrastructure projects according to a process that is publicly transparent, agreed and set out in advance.

Mr Barber — I can't wait.

Mr MULINO — It will be there very soon. This organisation has taken a few months to coalesce, and the legislation to establish this body will be here not too far into the future. It is not the kind of thing you want to rush; it is an important organisation and the process will be clarified very soon.

We have to ask ourselves how we want to evaluate major infrastructure projects. Is it through a body like that, with clear terms of reference and with established internal expertise, or is it through a standing committee which is given instructions to consider projects, whatever considering them means? It is an inappropriate and inefficient way in which to evaluate those projects. To say to a committee that it is to consider projects is basically telling it to go off on a fishing expedition with no guidance. It is really the wrong direction to go in.

We should be heading towards more structure, more established process and more expertise being devoted to the kinds of analysis that we need for these kinds of projects, such as rigorous cost-benefit analysis and rigorous analysis of the financeability of projects, such as the evaluation of projects in the context of the state's overall infrastructure requirements. This is the kind of analysis we need for major infrastructure projects such as the level crossings project and Melbourne Metro. We do not need standing committees to be given instructions to just consider these projects every few months, whatever that means. What we need is to put these projects through the wringer before they are agreed to.

When Infrastructure Victoria is established, it will have that forward-looking responsibility so that when projects come onto the agenda they will be looked at rigorously. The point I would start with is that the motion's first two references are, firstly, open-ended in a way that is inappropriate and sets a bad precedent and, secondly, far too vague. I will go through each of these three references in turn. I will start with the first one, which is the reference requiring the economy and infrastructure committee to look at five major infrastructure projects and to then examine any other public infrastructure or public works that it deems appropriate.

As I said, rather than having this kind of ad hoc process, what we want to do is to set up a process whereby through Infrastructure Victoria we have a process where projects are evaluated by a series of experts according to a set of pre-existing processes, and then Projects Victoria will come in, examine them and provide guidance in the way the projects are delivered. That is the appropriate mechanism, not to replicate that whole process and to replicate it without the necessary expertise or funding.

Let me quickly run through each of the five projects which are specifically mentioned in the motion. I think it is worth running through the existing accountability and transparency mechanisms. To provide a bit of context, I think it is worth noting that we have a very ambitious level crossings program.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MULINO — We will remove 50 level crossings in eight years. I hear those opposite suggesting that they may not consider it to be ambitious.

Mr Finn — I think it is overly ambitious!

Mr MULINO — But I think that when compared to what they achieved, it will be seen as a considerable achievement. It is not just ambitious, it is something we are making significant headway on. We established the Level Crossing Removal Authority very rapidly and we fast-tracked funding to that authority. In addition, we have already awarded contracts for the removal of the first four level crossings, with construction to commence in coming weeks. A \$524 million contract was awarded to John Holland and Kellogg Brown & Root to remove level crossings in Bentleigh, Ormond, McKinnon and Gardiner. That will involve the lines there being lowered and the roads being continued without disruption across those rail lines.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MULINO — Those opposite are making a lot of noise and squawking; I suspect they are probably frustrated that so much progress is being made. Their being in opposition is only just now dawning on them, and their frustration at not having seen such projects go through in their four years in government is leading them to lash out a little bit. They are going to have plenty of time over the next three and a half years to witness the removal of even more level crossings. My point is that what we are seeing through the Level Crossing Removal Authority is a process whereby we are laying out a plan. The removal of these four level crossings was discussed some weeks ago. We are now seeing a process where we have announced the contracts for the removal of those first four crossings, and we have laid out a program by which it will be delivered. We have already laid out the process for public engagement with the community, and this will be carried out over coming months, with the removal of those four level crossings to be started later this year. The consultation will start with information booths at Bentleigh and McKinnon railway stations during this month.

We have already seen a transparent process where the minister responsible has announced the awarding of contracts, we have an authority which is going to deliver this project and we have a community engagement process which will involve key stakeholders, including public transport experts, members of Parliament and members of the community. That is a key step.

Another key achievement which will be delivered in this term is the removal of nine more level crossings between Caulfield and Dandenong on the Pakenham line. A call for expressions of interest for that package of level crossings removal was released yesterday. This is Melbourne's busiest line. There was an

announcement some weeks ago of a significant investment by the government in this line. Over \$2 billion will fund the removal of nine level crossings, which is all the level crossings between Caulfield and Dandenong. In addition, there will also be improvement of four stations and a significant investment in rolling stock.

The removal of these level crossings on this particular line is absolutely critical. Some boom gates on this line are down for up to 87 minutes across the 2-hour peak period. Removing every single level crossing in that Caulfield to Dandenong stretch is critical for residents right throughout the east. Indeed, people out where I have my electorate office in Pakenham have been communicating to me that it is going to significantly improve their commute. We have a very transparent process where we announced some weeks ago that we were going to undertake a significant investment in the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines. We announced that that was going to comprise the removal of level crossings, station upgrades and a significant investment in rolling stock. We are now going through the process of transparently undertaking an expression of interest, and then, as with the four level crossings I just mentioned, we will work with the community through the delivery process when we get to that stage.

The Level Crossing Removal Authority is responsible for transparently delivering the level crossings program. There will be reporting mechanisms, and members will find that the process will be reported through the annual reports of the department. They will find that the budgeting process will provide updates on delivery, and they will find that the minister and the Level Crossing Removal Authority will provide public commentary on each stage of the process.

It is important that I spell out the processes that are already in place for that particular suite of infrastructure projects so that it is clear that we are not rejecting this motion because we are trying to avoid transparency. There are already transparency and accountability mechanisms in place, and it would serve no purpose to then have a standing committee consider — whatever that means — the level crossings program.

The next item mentioned in the motion is the western distributor. Before commenting specifically on the western distributor, I refer to the five-stage process that guides the assessment of market-led proposals under this government. At the moment this government is dealing with a market-led proposal in relation to a major potential infrastructure investment on the western side of the city. Stage 1 of that process is the filtering of proposals. A private party might submit a market-led

proposal to government for consideration, and then the Department of Treasury and Finance will determine whether it complies with information requirements and is appropriate for consideration under the market-led proposal guidelines.

Stage 2 involves strategic assessment and recommendation. Under this filtering element of the five-stage process the government undertakes a strategic assessment of the merits of the proposal to determine whether it should proceed to stage 3. Stage 3 involves procurement and preparing an investment case. This is a stage of the process where the government agrees with the proponent on either the terms of exclusive negotiations or the approach to a competitive tendering process. Stage 4 involves negotiation, development and assessment of the final offer, and stage 5 is the awarding of the contract.

I wanted to spell out those five stages because it is critical to point out when looking at the second element of the first reference that we, as part of a new government, have put in place a strong market-led proposal regime, so there are already transparent mechanisms in place for the evaluation of this particular project.

The proposal put forward by Transurban broadly comprises three components: an upgrade and widening of the West Gate Freeway from the M80 Ring Road through to the West Gate Bridge, a new connection from the West Gate Freeway to CityLink and improved access to Webb Dock. This project is going to generate a significant number of benefits. It is going to halve the travel time for people heading into the city from the M80-M1 interchange. It is going to create thousands of new jobs, including 3500 construction jobs. It will take up to 50 per cent of trucks off certain roads, and it will generate significantly increased access to the port.

The point is that we have received a market-led proposal from Transurban in relation to an area where there is clearly a significant need for infrastructure investment. The previous government, as has oft been debated in this place, put all its eggs into a project on the eastern side of the city with a very low cost-benefit ratio. We are now faced with a market-led proposal for a project on the western side of the city, where public policy experts all agree there is a greater need for investment.

Mr Finn — The world's most expensive T-intersection.

Mr MULINO — I am surprised that the member opposite is so opposed to strengthening infrastructure in

his own area. I am surprised by that altogether, given that the cost-benefit ratio of this project is 1.6. He is demeaning it by saying it is an expensive T-intersection. I hope those comments will come back to haunt the person so blithely throwing them around.

This project has a very strong cost-benefit ratio. It is a good starting point, a starting point that those on the other side did not bother with. The one project they put up had a cost-benefit ratio of 0.45. If they had had a six-monthly reporting regime, it would have stated that the cost-benefit ratio was 0.45. Six months later it would be 0.45 and a further six months later it would still be 0.45. Another six months later it would state that after some agglomeration economics were applied, it was now up to about 0.78, but it would still be under 1. They might consider the project a bunch of times, but that would not fix the cost-benefit ratio.

We are suggesting that we not have the standing committee go through a six-month review process. We have an existing rigorous arrangement in place to examine market-led proposals. What are we going to do in stage 3? We are going to bring in external experts. We are going to set up an independent panel consisting of Dr Kerry Schott and Tony Canavan. Dr Schott is somebody who I would imagine is above criticism, even when people are undertaking highly politicised motions such as the one we are debating. She is widely respected in the infrastructure space at state and federal levels. She has worked with both sides of politics, and she has worked on major federal infrastructure projects. Dr Schott being brought in to examine this project under a transparent set of processes is highly appropriate, highly transparent and the right way to do it. What is the point of the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure further considering this project when Tony Canavan and Dr Schott are about to undertake a rigorous consideration process? In fact this rigorous process is already underway.

The Melbourne Metro rail project is the next project identified as being in need of consideration by the standing committee every six months, and again we need to look at the process that is underway. In our first budget we have dedicated significant funds over the forward estimates to start this project and get it to a point where construction will commence this term. With a project of this complexity that is no mean feat. People have been talking about this project for decades. For many years it has been identified as being of critical need, and now finally it has funds explicitly dedicated to it in the budget. It has its own delivery authority and is making real progress.

The Melbourne Metro Rail Authority was one of the projects fast-tracked in the first few months of this government, and it was critical that the government did that. The authority has already started a number of critical pieces of work, one of which is geotechnical investigations. These investigations are extremely complex and costly and are being undertaken in a series of stages that will inform some of the specifics of how the project is delivered. There are a number of areas that have been identified in a transparent way. This is all publicly available information. These investigations are being undertaken on a time line that is set out in public. They have been examined by public policy experts and discussed in the media, and they have received funding in the budget and are already underway.

The first stage of investigations, which will occur between the middle of this year and August, requires boreholes in a number of areas — for example, the Arden and Lloyd streets area, the CBD, the Swanston Street area, the Domain parklands and the Domain interchange. This is necessary preparatory work. It is being done according to a timetable that is laid out publicly and according to a process during which the public are consulted at each step of the way. There are further stages to the geotechnical investigations that are also laid out in public. The methodology is laid out in public, as are the community impacts. That is one of the key pieces of work that will be undertaken over the coming 12 to 24 months.

There are also a number of traffic studies being undertaken to manage traffic in the lead-up to and during delivery. These traffic studies are being undertaken at a number of intersections in the Parkville area, at over 10 intersections in the Melbourne CBD and at a range of intersections in the Domain area.

We set up a delivery authority. That delivery authority is regularly placing updates on its website. It has set out the major tranches of work it will undertake over the next 12 to 24 months. It is now undertaking that work and will engage in community consultation along the way. Again, it does not seem at all useful to have a standing committee devote its precious resources, without any guidance, to 'consider' this, whatever that means.

The fourth item of paragraph (1) of this reference is in regard to the lease of the port of Melbourne. It is fair to say this transaction has the support of both the government and the opposition. It certainly had the support of the opposition when it was in government. In broad terms the process commenced by the opposition when it was in government is being followed through,

so one would hope there is bipartisan support for this particular transaction.

The lease of the port of Melbourne is very much in the interests of Victoria. It will see assets that are currently not being optimally utilised diverted from where they are on the balance sheet to where they can be invested in a much-needed level crossings program. I imagine the removal of the state's 50 busiest and most dangerous level crossings gets support right across the political spectrum. In order to do this responsibly, in the context of the budgetary settings in which we find ourselves, we need to undertake the lease of the port. We very much look forward to the opposition's support of this process.

The lease of the port is a process in which there has been extensive consultation with stakeholders, and we will map out a transaction process. Very soon we will introduce legislation, and that legislation will go through the Parliament and receive the kinds of scrutiny legislation should receive. It will, as members would expect in a lease process, set out the terms of the lease. It will also set out any post-lease regulatory arrangements, including economic regulatory arrangements. Any arrangements arising from the transaction that are contained in the legislation will be fully reviewed by both the Assembly and the Council. That will occur over the coming months, and it is entirely appropriate.

We will then undertake a lease transaction process that is clearly mapped out. It is not useful and is a waste of valuable committee resources for the committee to provide six-monthly updates on that process when there are already mechanisms in place, reporting arrangements in place and potentially other arrangements for the evaluation of the transaction.

The fifth element is the Melbourne Airport rail link. I think this is a rather amusing — —

Mr Finn — You think it is funny, do you?

Mr MULINO — I think the inclusion of it is amusing.

Mr Finn — You think the sabotage of our airport is funny, do you?

Mr MULINO — I think the word 'sabotage' implies that something existed or that a process was underway. What we have with Melbourne Metro is a delivery authority that has money in the budget over the forward estimates and that is actually delivering a project. What the coalition had with the Melbourne

Airport rail link was a series of advertisements. That is all it had.

If we want to report every six months on the former government's advertising campaigns, it might be useful, but let us look at the Melbourne Airport rail link and how far members opposite got with that. The Napthine government ran an advertising campaign from November 2013 to October 2014. It was recently reported that this advertising campaign has been evaluated. It was not evaluated every six months by the economy and infrastructure committee, but it was evaluated nonetheless. It might be relevant to look at the evaluation.

There was \$2.2 million spent on advertising from November 2013 to January 2014, \$1.8 million spent from February to March 2014, \$1.5 million from March to April 2014, \$2.8 million from May to June 2014 — in just a six-week period — and then there was an absolute glut of ads worth \$5 million between July and October 2014 in the lead-up to the election. That takes us right up to the caretaker period. It was a glut of ads. There were all these fancy, computer-generated images of trains going to the airport, but there were no actual trains or actual boring equipment. We had people from the government handing out fake tickets. These Monopoly tickets are all the coalition delivered. It was all fake. It was all computer-generated imagery.

We need a report on the coalition's advertising campaigns, and now one has been written. The *Moving Victoria Campaign Evaluation* report was written by Hall and Partners Open Mind, who found that the former government's ads were quickly forgotten. But no-one is going to forget the waste of money — Victorians did not forget the waste of money, and they voted accordingly. If you go out to people in the community and ask them if the economy and infrastructure committee should look into the Melbourne Airport rail link, I think they will say that we should look at whether governments should waste \$5 million on advertising a non-existent project in the lead-up to an election. That is what they would like us to report on, not on the imaginary Melbourne Airport rail link project of the previous government.

From this project came only one thing that did not have a schedule, one thing that came so frequently you did not need to look at a timetable, but it was the ads, not the trains. I think it is ironic that those opposite have the audacity to come into this place and put forward a motion suggesting that the economy and infrastructure committee report every six months on progress on the Melbourne Airport rail link.

The motion also refers to ‘any other public sector infrastructure or public works projects’, and this is the real problem with the motion. The problem with this motion is that it is not genuine; it is a fishing expedition. It is basically demanding that this standing committee put forward reports every six months on whatever it feels like without guidance or content. It wants this committee to make random, ad hoc statements about any kind of infrastructure projects that come to mind. That is wasting the time of a committee that may well find itself needing to deal with critically important issues.

The committees of the Council do not have unlimited resources, and we cannot have them withstanding references of such little value and reporting without guidance on matters that are extremely complicated. When it comes to infrastructure, we are setting up processes that will rigorously evaluate major projects of this complexity. We are setting up Infrastructure Victoria and Projects Victoria, and even before those two bodies are established, as I set out in some detail in relation to the projects identified in this motion, there are processes in place to make announcements at each stage. Further steps in the process are being laid out, authorities are being established and there are solid, rigorous governance arrangements. These are the right mechanisms by which these project should be evaluated, not, I reiterate, by the ad hoc process being suggested by this motion.

The second part of the motion requires the environment and planning committee to report every six months on the outcome of the state government’s policy on local government rate capping. Rate capping is a very important policy for many people in our community. As somebody from Eastern Victoria Region and also, I might add, as an ex-councillor, I believe that I have at least some understanding of the complexities of this issue. Eastern Victoria Region has many suburban areas, it has 4 of our state’s 10 interface councils and it has a number of regional councils.

Local governments provide incredibly important services to our communities. Councils provide between 50 and 120 different types of service depending on the community. We have 79 councils, which have an annual revenue of approximately \$7.6 billion and are responsible for over \$70 billion of community infrastructure and assets and the employment of 42 500 people across the state. Clearly in aggregate it is an incredibly important sector, but I think it is important — in addition to looking at these aggregate numbers — to reflect also on the heterogeneity of the sector, which is very important and reflects the heterogeneity of our communities.

Councils have some commonality in the services they provide, but in a sense each of the 79 councils is unique. They differ in terms of the demographic profiles of the communities they serve. They differ in terms of the geography they serve. Obviously many suburban councils have very dense populations. Many rural councils face the challenge of service provision to dispersed populations. They face very different financial circumstances, both in terms of their rate bases but also the condition of their inherited assets. They also face different circumstances in terms of policy settings, some of which are self-imposed. Some of the policies that councils set will have an impact on the constraints they face in delivering services.

I think it is worth observing that rates presently constitute a bit over 50 per cent of councils’ revenue. It has been hovering at about 50 per cent for some years. In the 2013–14 year it was around 56 per cent. Clearly it is a significant proportion, so what we do with rates is going to have a significant impact on the capacity of councils to deliver infrastructure and services.

It is also fair to say that there are broader issues around cost shifting. This is not just an issue with councils; this is an issue with all three levels of government. At present cost shifting is an issue between the federal government and state governments, as we know, where the federal government in the forward estimates is trying to clamp down severely on the payments it makes in relation to education and health services. I think it is worth acknowledging that cost shifting can also be an issue between state and federal governments.

Rates are important. In addition to noting that last year 56 per cent of council revenue came from rates — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, whilst I certainly find Mr Mulino’s contribution interesting, it is actually not about the motion. The motion goes to the referral of matters to upper house committees, not the substance of the motion, into which Mr Mulino is going into great deal. I ask that you bring the member back to the actual motion.

Ms Mikakos — On the point of order, Acting President, this is a wideranging motion. It is multifaceted in its content. It is important that members have the opportunity to canvass the substance of the issue, because it goes to the heart of whether there is actually a justification for these particular matters being referred to the relevant parliamentary committees. It is very much on point to have members able to canvass the discussion about the substance of the issues at hand,

because it goes to the heart of whether there is in fact a justification for the referrals in the first place.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) — Order! I ask the member to concentrate on the issues and tell us why they should or should not be referred to the committees.

Mr MULINO — In making these observations I will emphasise for the benefit of the members of the house that I am stressing some of this context because the complexity of these matters is such that it is not appropriate for there to be a review every six months. In particular what I was going to get onto, and will get onto in a moment, is that the Essential Services Commission is currently reviewing in a very thorough way these very complicated issues, so we do not need a standing committee to provide a six-monthly update based on almost no guidance.

This motion is based on the notion that the standing committee will ‘consider’ this matter. It is extremely complicated, and it is much better left to the Essential Services Commission to undertake a full process. I am certainly not casting aspersions on anybody in this chamber or querying their knowledge of local government, but what I am saying is that these matters, their complexity and the interrelationship between any kind of potential rate cap and economic regulation principles means that the Essential Services Commission and the review that it is undertaking should be left to run its course rather than undertaking some kind of ad hoc process which reports every six months.

I was going to make an additional background comment in order to add to the notion that this is not appropriate for this committee because over the last seven years we have found that rates and charges per assessment have increased significantly more than both the CPI and the local government cost index. The local government cost index is relevant here, because it reflects what it actually costs local government to deliver services — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, the member is defying your ruling to come back to the substance of the motion, which is the referral of matters to the upper house committees and not the deep detail of specific matters which are to be referred, which is obviously the one area the member may perhaps have some knowledge of. Apart from that he is obviously flying by the seat of his pants.

Ms Shing — On the point of order, Acting President, I am concerned that the member raising the

point of order may be suffering from some hard-of-hearing issues this morning, because after she raised the issue previously, Mr Mulino returned squarely to the issues, not that I think there was any issue of relevance raised properly in the first instance. Mr Mulino was in fact talking through these issues through by referring to the suitability of the Essential Services Commission to conduct this review and looking at the detail and substance of the issues now being proposed by the motion. On that basis I suggest that if Mrs Peulich wants to raise a specific issue, she should wait her turn to do so. This should not simply be an opportunity to debate the substance of Mr Mulino’s contribution.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) — Order! I think the member was being relevant to the motion. I ask the member to continue.

Mr MULINO — I hope to comply with the Acting President’s ruling. I am trying to look at a couple of the specific issues that the Essential Services Commission is already looking at — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms Hartland — On a point of order, Acting President, I am trying to listen to the debate so I can make a contribution. I ask you, Acting President, to bring the chamber back to order so that I can hear the debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! It would be wonderful if, in my transition to Acting President, I could bring the chamber back to some order. I ask the member to focus on the matter at hand.

Mr MULINO — The specific matter at hand is the question: should the environment and planning committee undertake an ongoing, rolling six-month report on the rate-capping issue? The answer is no, given there is a very detailed review currently being undertaken by an expert body on economic regulation issues, which will come back to this place and which we can then discuss. After we have seen that report, let us have a discussion about whether we need to undertake a further inquiry. But it seems to be particularly pointless to undertake a review entirely in parallel with that.

The point I was trying to make about what the Essential Services Commission is currently doing is that firstly, it has just issued a 50-page discussion paper; secondly, it is undertaking extensive consultation with stakeholders; and thirdly, some of the issues it is grappling with are very complicated. That is not to say that people on Legislative Council committees cannot grapple with

complicated issues, but the point is that it just reinforces the notion that we do not want to replicate processes that are already going through extensive consultation and dealing with extremely complicated matters.

I note that one of the key issues underpinning the issue of rate capping is that it is true that councils have revenue requirements that grow, and I acknowledge that, but it is also true that households have limited budgets. What we need is sustainability on both fronts. You cannot have council rates per assessment growing ad infinitum and growing faster than household budgets. As a community we need to find a solution where we have sustainable revenue for councils which recognises the heterogeneity of councils and one that also recognises that ultimately rates come from household budgets.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MULINO — I would have thought that those opposite would not find those core statements to be contentious, but from the barrage of noise opposite clearly the sustainability of council budgets within household budgets is something they cannot agree with.

The point I was going to make about the complexity of this is that there is the local government cost index, which is a relevant key concept, but it is a complicated index to pin down. It includes wages, equipment, parts and raw material, but it also includes — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, the member continues to defy the rulings of the Chair and continues to debate specific matters which are to be the subject of the referrals rather than discussing the process and the merit of referring these cases to standing committees of the upper house.

Ms Shing — On the point of order, Acting President, Mrs Peulich, in bringing this point of order, is raising what is an interesting bet each way. On the one hand she is saying that the process should be the focus of this motion and the member's contribution. On the other hand the motion itself is drafted in such an expansive fashion that it requires consideration of the detail, which Mr Mulino is turning his mind to. I note that the most recent view expressed from the Chair, and this was by your predecessor as Acting President some 5 minutes ago, was that Mr Mulino was indeed contributing in a very relevant fashion. I encourage you, Acting President, to allow the member to continue without persistent interjection simply because Mrs Peulich is discontent with what he has to say.

Mr MULINO — On the point of order, Acting President, what I am trying to do, which I think is

relevant, is explain that there is a process underway which would cover off on everything that this inquiry would want to cover off on, so it would be redundant.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! I ask Mr Mulino to keep his comments to why these matters should or should not be referred to a committee. That would be staying within the remit of the motion at hand, and hopefully we can move on. I ask the member to continue.

Mr MULINO — The 'why not' is because there is a process of the Essential Services Commission (ESC) underway to examine this issue. I believe it is entirely inappropriate to waste the limited resources of a committee by running an inquiry in parallel. To reiterate the 'why not', when one looks at the breadth of issues that the Essential Services Commission is looking at, the stakeholder consultation process that it is undertaking and the way it is undertaking the review, it covers off on all of the bases that one would want to cover off on at this stage. It just does not make sense to replicate that process.

If those opposite have issues with the range of matters being covered, I would argue that we should discuss that. Let us put issues in front of the Essential Services Commission. But in the commission's issues paper, on pages 7 to 13, it raises just about every issue one might imagine needs to be raised — and not just that, but it also raises initial responses, its approach, the eight principles which will govern its work and a detailed work program with all the consultation that it will undertake. If those opposite have an issue with this detailed process, my argument is: why do they not come into this place and suggest some additions to that? Why do they not write a submission to the ESC? Why would they want to set up a very unusual and unorthodox process where a review gives a report every six months?

Directly on the process issue, I would suggest that those opposite may not be entirely motivated by wanting to dig into the public policy aspects of local government. I suspect they might want to set up some kind of amorphous, open-ended, never-ending, vague fishing expedition, and I believe that is not the appropriate way to use our committee resources. I will not go through all the detail of the report, but it is a fascinating options paper. I believe it is well worth a read. I suspect part of the problem is that those opposite probably have not read it in enough detail. If they have a read, they will find that — because it covers off on such a detailed process and explicitly deals with so many key issues in a thorough way — it would be very negligent of this house to waste the resources of the environment and

planning committee on yet another parallel, redundant review.

The last of the three references in this motion is in regard to the machinery of government review. Again this is really a disingenuous reference that is not aimed at actually improving policy outcomes and a sensible evaluation of the way that public sector delivery is tracking in the first part of this government's term. There have been machinery of government changes, and it is worth noting that in broad terms those changes were to elevate some community portfolios to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. I think the rationale for that is very clear to everybody — in particular raising the prevention of family violence to the Department of Premier and Cabinet so that the royal commission has the whole-of-government backing that it needs. That overarching change in terms of machinery of government is well understood. The new portfolio of Special Minister of State was established to oversee government transparency, integrity and accountability, and the number of departments has changed from nine to seven to better align policy and service delivery options.

The motion before us asks for an interim report by 30 November — and again the wording of the motion is 'to inquire into, consider and provide' a report. It is so vague and lacking in guidance that one has to almost guess at the motivation of this motion. Is this an attempt by those opposite to try to find a few additional stationery costs? Is that what they are coming at? Are they wanting to have a kind of ongoing Public Accounts and Estimates Committee investigation, or is this a serious attempt to look at whether or not government is delivering services in a better way through the new government arrangements? If it is the latter, then this is not the right inquiry.

Obviously there are different ways one can look at machinery of government changes. It is often an issue that is examined from a very superficial perspective. As I alluded to earlier, quite often people look at machinery of government changes and say the only winners are the printers — the people changing the logos and the business cards. It is fair to say that pretty much every government undertakes some kind of machinery of government changes when it starts and sometimes also additional machinery of government changes during its term.

Without wanting to cast aspersions on past governments of either stripe, I would say that most governments undertake machinery of government changes in part at least because they want to achieve better policy outcomes. Part of achieving better policy

outcomes is the organisational structure of the government itself. If one is to really get to the heart of machinery of government changes and ask whether those changes better align the structure of departments with service delivery, that is not something which is going to be answered by this inquiry. If that is really the question, we have to think much harder about it and how best to answer it. I would argue that one would want to have terms of reference that specifically address longer term service delivery changes and that allow for the committee to report after a sufficient time for the machinery of government changes to have actually played out. The reference in paragraph (3) of the motion seems to be an entirely open-ended one that wants to do nothing more than give the committee an excuse to raise machinery of government as an issue.

Again, when I see terms of reference this vague and this broad I worry that this is an attempt to sensationalise the issue. It is potentially an important issue, one that goes to the heart of how well government delivers services, but it will not be addressed if there are very short reporting time frames and if no guidance whatsoever is provided as to what is being examined. With such a short reporting time — the interim report is due by 30 June this year — and no guidance as to the issues to be looked at, I do not think it is possible for this to be anything other than a superficial examination of the machinery of government changes. I think that might be what is driving this, rather than the need to look at the more important aspects of the issue.

In concluding my comments on this third reference, machinery of government presents an important set of issues, which is why every government looks at it in an attempt to improve services and deliver policy outcomes. When this incoming government moved prevention of family violence into the Department of Premier and Cabinet it was an attempt to raise the profile of that issue — to give it more of a whole-of-government focus. Let us evaluate that, but let us not do it through this kind of reference and by the end of November this year. That would be an ineffective and inappropriate way to evaluate the matter. I think the right way to evaluate it would be to look at the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence and how well the government has implemented them. That is something we need more time to look at, and it would require far more specific terms of reference — that is, how well did the government deal with the recommendations of the royal commission?

One needs to look at what the specific machinery of government changes this government brought in were trying to achieve and when it will be possible to

evaluate whether they have achieved those outcomes. This inquiry would not achieve that purpose, and I believe it would almost by definition end up looking at machinery of government changes from a superficial vantage point. I do not believe that is in anybody's interests because, as I said, every government undertakes machinery of government changes when it comes in. By and large these changes are well motivated. We should not sensationalise this issue.

In conclusion, the issues of transparency, accountability and evaluation are important. When it comes to the major infrastructure projects, firstly, I do not believe it is appropriate to have rolling six-month reports with almost no guidance in the terms of reference. It is just an inappropriate way for committees to function. Secondly, we are setting up well-resourced authorities full of experts that are best placed to undertake the initial evaluation, and then we can have parliamentary scrutiny of what they come up with. There is no point running parallel processes.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr MULINO — I look forward to joining you in that. When it comes to the second reference, the Essential Services Commission is undertaking a detailed process with extensive stakeholder and community engagement. Let us allow that process to run through without trying to duplicate it, and then let us review what it comes up with. I look forward to joining others in this place in that process.

Finally, instead of looking at machinery of government changes from a superficial perspective — trying to get a headline, looking at stationery costs — let us ask why they were instituted. We can go through each of the main changes one by one; for example, why was prevention of family violence brought under the Department of Premier and Cabinet? If we want to evaluate whether that was successful or not, let us do that at the appropriate time, not in November this year when the government will still be working through the recommendations of the royal commission. Let us allow these things to occur at the right time and with appropriate terms of reference. For those reasons, I oppose each of the elements of this motion.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I will not be taking an hour to go through my contribution. The Greens will support this motion. I want to go through each part of it to explain why but also to talk about some of our concerns with it. In terms of part 1, it was interesting to listen to the government's concerns about this motion, because I also have concerns about transparency regarding these major projects.

Living in Footscray, the western distributor is the one that will be coming up quite soon. This is a market-led project. I do not believe Transurban is capable of engaging with the community. I do not believe that at this stage we have enough detail about what is going to happen with this project. We have a squiggly line on a pretend map. We do not know which houses are going to be affected, we do not know where the vent stacks are going to be, and we do not know whether any of Yarraville Gardens will be lost.

We are told that 50 per cent of the current truck traffic on the roads of Yarraville and the inner west — and we have 21 000 truck movements a day — will be taken off the road, but if they have to pay tolls, will that actually happen? Unless there is an actual truck ban in the area, those container trucks will continue to travel through the area. At this stage we do not have any proof that these things will actually happen. It would be appropriate for this project to go to a parliamentary committee to look at how it would work.

I hark back to a previous project that was spoken about this morning — that is, regional rail. This is a project that the Greens supported, but I have to say that local residents were incredibly badly treated during the construction of this project over two governments. Some scrutiny of the way residents are treated during major projects would be also very appropriate.

On the second part of the motion, the Greens have huge concerns about the issue of rate capping. I was a councillor at the City of Maribyrnong. My colleague Ms Sam Dunn was at the Shire of Yarra Ranges and Mr Barber was at the City of Yarra. We know how difficult it is to run a budget in a council. I think one of the problems is that the government has not thought through what rate capping is going to affect. With that loss of income, what will councils have to cancel? Will it be Meals on Wheels? Will it be home help? Will it be respite care? Will it be maternal health services? Will it be roads?

For councils in the outer suburbs which have to spend huge amounts of money on road infrastructure, does this mean projects will not be able to go ahead? Some areas have large numbers of swimming pools. This morning Ms Dunn conveyed to me that there are seven swimming pools in the Yarra Ranges shire. How will the council maintain those swimming pools if there is a rate cap? A very important issue that will come up later this year is the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) negotiations. If there is a rate cap, how will councils fund EBA pay rises without cutting staff? There is merit in all those issues going to a parliamentary committee so it can look at what the effects will be.

I also have some concerns about paragraph (3) of the motion. I would agree with the government that it does appear to be very wide and broad. I do not think it is unnecessary, but I certainly do not want it to be used as a witch-hunt. I think the parliamentary committees should do proper work and should not be used for political pointscoring. I remind opposition members that when they were in government they refused some 50 committee references over a term of Parliament. The Leader of the Government at that time would simply not allow references that had any merit. He allowed only references that he thought were suitable and would keep committees busy. In fact at one stage one of the committees I sat on was inquiring into organ transplants and discovered there was a problem at one of the major hospitals, and the minister closed the committee down. I certainly do not want that kind of behaviour to happen.

Parliamentary committees can do good work, and they should be allowed to do that work and not be used by any party in the upper house to score political points over other parties. We can do good work, and it is our responsibility to do so. With those few words, the Greens will be supporting the motion.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — It was fascinating to hear Mr Mulino's contribution — 'fascinating' is probably a bit strong, it has to be said. 'Fascinating' might not be the appropriate word, but give me enough time and I might come up with the appropriate word. What we heard from Mr Mulino was an audition. He is a man who sees an opportunity, and he got up in this house today and he went for it. Let me say to Mr Mulino that if he wishes to be a minister, it takes more than the ability to bloviate. It takes a lot more than standing up in this house and bloviating for an hour about the first thing that comes into your head.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr FINN — I can understand why Mr Herbert is interested in this, because he wants to know who will be sitting beside him, and I would agree with Mr Herbert if he were to say to Mr Mulino after the audition, 'Don't call us, we'll call you'! I can fully understand that because, fair dinkum, it was quite extraordinary. I have to say to Mr Mulino — with respect and not referring to you of course, Madam Acting President — that the sort of bloviating we heard here this morning is the sort of thing we would normally expect from certain members of the Greens. Perhaps it is because of where he sits — it may have rubbed off on Mr Mulino. I do not know. I will give him the benefit of the doubt, but we would normally expect this sort of thing from over there.

When you melt down all the nonsense that Mr Mulino brought into the house today, it comes down to just one thing: his view is that the Parliament is not a proper place to examine the government. If the Parliament is not an appropriate place to examine the government, where do you examine the government? Who examines the government? What examines the government? If the government is not held responsible by this Parliament, then our system is finished. It is over.

However, that is the argument Mr Mulino, on behalf of the government, came in here with today. That is the argument he put to us for over an hour, in words that went around and around in circles, repeating himself incessantly. But when you get down to the crux of it, what he was saying was that the government should not be responsible to the Parliament. That is what Mr Mulino was saying. That is a very sad attitude but one, I have to say, we have come to expect from a government that, after a very short period of time, is showing the sort of arrogance that normally long-term governments display.

Today we had it here. Mr Mulino wandered in here and laid it on the table. He said, 'We are the government. We don't need the Parliament. We don't want the Parliament — we are the government!'. Well hail Caesar!

Mrs Peulich — He thinks he's a frontbencher!

Mr FINN — He does. As I said, it was an hour-long audition. We will just see where it goes. He may well have a bachelor of bloviation bestowed upon him as a result of his contribution today. In fact I am rather tempted to put up a motion to have his speech referred to a committee for examination, because I reckon it would keep us going for quite some time.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr FINN — Mrs Shingle over there is very upset about my comments about Mr Mulino. She is dirty because she reckons she should be in the ministry. Good on her. A bit of competition, despite what the ALP may think, is a damn good thing.

Ms Hartland — On a point of order, Acting President, during this debate there have been a number of points of order about relevance, and I wonder whether Mr Finn's comments have any relevance to this current debate.

Mr FINN — On the point of order, Acting President, I was responding to the contribution by Mr Mulino, so in fact it was very relevant to the debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! I will remind Mr Finn, as I reminded Mr Mulino, to stick to the matter of why these matters should or should not be referred to the committees.

Mr Melhem — On a point of order, Acting President, the Chair should be asking Mr Finn to stop reflecting on Ms Shing and to call her by her proper name.

Mr FINN — On the point of order, Acting President, I am not exactly sure how I reflected upon her. I said she wanted to be a minister; I do not see that as a reflection. There would be a number of members of this house — in fact a number of members in both houses — who would want to be ministers at some stage. I do not see that as a reflection. In fact some might actually say it is a good thing. It may be a compliment.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! If we could have some order, that would be lovely. I refer Mr Finn back to the motion and to speaking to the motion. I ask members to refer to each other by their names.

Mr FINN — It was in fact just meant as a jest, of course, referring to the comment by the President earlier in the day. If certain members have no sense of humour, that is hardly my fault. That is just the way it goes.

This motion is important because it allows for what I would describe as an extremely appropriate examination by the Parliament of what this government is doing or not doing. I am one who believes in the supremacy of Parliament in a parliamentary democracy. I am staggered that there are members of this house who do not believe in that, but here we have a situation where a member has got up in this house and declared just that. I believe this motion is extremely important, and as a member of the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure I warmly welcome the opportunity to examine —

Mr Herbert — On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Finn, in referring to a previous speaker, made an allegation that that speaker did not believe that the Parliament was the highest decision-maker in the state. That is simply not correct. You can stretch a point when you are talking about the relevance of a particular motion, but really that is just totally inappropriate, and it should be withdrawn.

Mrs Peulich — On the point of order, Acting President, the minister in raising his point of order is

actually engaging in debating. If he wants to contribute to the debate, he should be putting his name on the list.

Ms Shing — On the point of order, Acting President, I encourage you to reflect on the fact that if Mrs Peulich wishes to raise points of order of this nature, she should first start by walking the walk, as it were.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Ms Shing, that is not a point of order. There is no point of order.

Mr FINN — As I was saying, as a member of the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure I warmly welcome this reference because it encompasses a number of matters and a number of questions I believe should be examined. In particular paragraph (1)(a) of the motion reads:

projects relating to the removal of railway level crossings;

There is one question I would like to know the answer to at the moment as a member for Western Metropolitan Region and as shadow parliamentary secretary for Melbourne's west. I would like to know if the government has pulled the funding for the St Albans level crossing removal on Main Road. I would like to know if the government has put a halt to that project. I would like to know if it has pulled the \$220 million allocated by the coalition government last year, and I would like to know if the government has reallocated that money over to the other side of town. That is what I would like to know, and this committee can examine those things.

The committee could find out if the money for St Albans is now going to be spent in marginal seats. That is what this committee can find out. I can understand why the government would have a very low opinion of the member for St Albans and why it would want to send the money elsewhere, but the fact of the matter is that this was first promised by the Labor Party back in 1982 — that is, to my memory. There are people in St Albans who can go back even further, and some of them tell me that this was first promised by Labor back in the 1960s. I was in short pants back in the 1960s and do not quite remember. The fact of the matter is that Labor did promise the St Albans level crossing would be removed in 1982. It was elected in 1982. It had 10 years to remove the level crossing, but it did not happen.

In 1999 the Labor Party promised it again, and Labor was elected at that election. It had 11 years to remove the level crossing but did not do it. Here we have a government which may have actually shafted the

people of St Albans yet again. If this has happened, let me assure the government that all hell will break loose.

These are matters that this committee can and should look at, and these are matters that should be referred to the committee, because it comes down to the basic integrity of a system. If the money has been ripped out of St Albans and put into Bentleigh or some other such place, then — —

Ms Crozier — And Oakleigh.

Mr FINN — And Oakleigh, indeed. This comes to the integrity of the decision-making process of this government. It comes to the integrity of a process. That is something that should be — indeed must be — examined by this Parliament. If the Parliament is in no position to examine the integrity of the government, then there is something desperately wrong. But Mr Mulino told us that the parliamentary examination of that would be inappropriate. That is just total nonsense.

This reference also refers to the examination of the western distributor proposal. There are more questions on the western distributor than you can poke a stick at. I, for one, would like the committee to examine what happened to the West Gate distributor. You might recall prior to the election that the then Leader of the Opposition, the current Premier, Mr Andrews, said the West Gate distributor was ‘shovel ready’ — that was the term he used. He said it was shovel ready; it was ready to go.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr FINN — Yes, we know what he was shovelling too.

Nobody knew anything about the West Gate distributor — where it would go or what it would do. Just because nobody knew, that did not seem to worry the then Leader of the Opposition, because he said it was shovel ready. I would have thought if it was shovel ready, the government would have started by now. But not only has the government not started it, it has canned it — it is gone! Where have the plans gone for this wonderful West Gate distributor that Mr Andrews was banging on — —

Ms Crozier — Another thought bubble?

Mr FINN — Another thought bubble. Word has it that Mr Andrews does have thought bubbles from time to time — usually not for very long and not very often.

Ms Crozier — On holidays?

Mr FINN — He might have been on holidays — he should go on holidays permanently. Do not get me started on public holidays.

What we have here is a situation where an opposition has gone to the people of Victoria saying, ‘We have got this great new plan. We are going to start on this wonderful new project immediately after the election if you vote for us. This is shovel ready’. Of course the people said, ‘Yes, we’ll vote for you’. The Labor Party was elected, but there is no shovel-ready project. In fact I do not even think there is a shovel, much less a project. This is something that needs to be examined.

Why are we now talking about the so-called western distributor when it should be called the ‘western T-intersection’ — because that is what it is, a dirty great T-intersection. This may go down in the Guinness book of records.

Mr Herbert interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Herbert does not get out to the west very often, but if he wants to come out, I will show him around. In fact I am happy to show any members opposite around the western suburbs and give them an idea of what we have to deal with out in the west.

Here we have the government making a proposal — we think it is proposing, but we are not sure. That is another reason that this should be referred to the committee, because we need answers on this. We need to know why Transurban seems to be the only one that is really enthusiastic about this. I think we might have a situation here where Transurban saw Daniel Andrews coming. Transurban said to itself, ‘We can take this bloke to the cleaners’. Apparently Transurban has said — this is what we can examine — ‘We can extend almost forever the toll situation that we have on other roads so that even if you are not using the western T-intersection, you will still have to pay tolls to pay for it’. That seems to me to be a very strange set-up, but as we know, the government apparently has not agreed to it — or has it?

The government has put up as some sort of proposal that it might or might not examine this matter at some stage, but a committee of this nature would be able to have a good, hard look at this. A committee of this nature would be able to say to the federal government, for example, ‘Yes, this proposal is worthwhile, and you should kick in a couple of billion dollars’, or whatever, or it could say to the federal government that this proposal is not real flash — keep the money for another time when we have something worthwhile.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Government tendering system

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the minister representing the Treasurer, Mr Jennings. Every year commercial building contractors across Victoria tender for hundreds of government contracts worth billions of dollars. Most of these contractors employ subcontractors, apprentices and labourers, and they purchase goods and supplies from other businesses around the state. Recently more and more of these Victorian construction businesses are going to the wall, because they are unable to compete against opportunistic companies that are prepared to game the tendering system by bidding an often ridiculously low price. With many Victorian companies facing such a bleak future, can the minister advise what the government is or will be doing to ensure that every company can compete in a fair, open and transparent tendering system and that those employed who work on these projects will receive their correct award entitlements?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Dr Carling-Jenkins for her question. Not for the first time has she raised in the Parliament since her arrival here her concern to make sure that there is not only a level playing field but some protection that is provided to Victorian employers and Victorian businesses.

On previous occasions we have talked about the way in which the procurement policies and the tendering arrangements of the Victorian government, as they currently exist, are able to provide for that greater certainty, or how they may be enhanced in the future to be able to provide for that certainty. The member will recall that on previous occasions I have indicated that the Victorian Industry Participation Policy program has been adopted by the incoming Andrews government to add to our procurement knowledge and capability and sharing with businesses across Victoria. It is the intention within the economic development portfolio of our government to drive better outcomes and to support a greater knowledge base in terms of the capability not only of employers to know what tenders are coming in a reliable and consistent fashion but to make sure that they are well armed to put in those appropriate tenders and to secure them.

That relies on good advice being provided to them about the nature of the procurement, the expectations of

capability that would be inherent within that enterprise and the way in which government can assist them in building that capability. Certainly that is a feature of the programs that the government has already embarked upon introducing. We recognise that there is a need to marry the objectives of our industry policies and our support for Victorian enterprise in terms of being job ready and skill ready to develop the workforce and to integrate and align the TAFE sector, taking into account how it works. We need to make sure that we have the skill development that supports those enterprises in their ability to be able to satisfy those tendering arrangements.

What we see is a proliferation of programs that are designed to have a pipeline of opportunities and to make sure that through that pipeline of opportunities Victorian businesses are well advised in advance of what will be expected of them. It is about supporting them in developing their internal capability to make sure that they are market ready and assisting them in developing the skills of their workforce to secure those outcomes.

This government is very determined to support exactly the policy intention that the member is seeking from us, and we are designing a range of programs to give effect to that during this term.

Supplementary question

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer, particularly regarding procurement processes. We find this commitment very encouraging. I point the minister to the Australian Senate Economics References Committee inquiry into the scale and incidence of insolvency in the Australian construction industry, and I ask: is the Victorian government prepared to hold an open and public inquiry into the government tendering processes, focusing on how they are used within the Victorian construction industry and what obligations are placed on tendering companies to ensure that employee entitlements are not traded off for profits?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — In terms of going the full distance in relation to the public engagement on this issue, I am going to fall short of that, except for giving the member an undertaking that, with my colleagues across government who are responsible for the various elements of not only these transactions but this scrutiny, I will encourage them to make sure that as a whole-of-government approach we are alive to the best protections that should be in place.

I will also encourage them to actively engage with relevant stakeholders, which may involve a public undertaking. That certainly should be an active consideration with employers, with employer representatives, with workers and with worker representatives to make sure that there is a well-engaged responsive policy setting to provide for the protections that the member quite rightly wants to protect. It is in the interests of this government to protect those outcomes. We will embark upon that, and I will encourage my ministerial colleagues to embrace the concept of a public engagement on them.

Melbourne–Warrnambool rail services

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Regional Development in her capacity of representing the Minister for Public Transport. In my six months as a member of Parliament I have become a regular user of the Melbourne to Warrnambool train. The service is relatively comfortable, but definitely antiquated, an issue that has been raised and documented prior to today. While work obviously needs to be done to lift the standard of the service, my biggest issue is the overcrowding and subsequent safety issues. All types of travellers — the elderly, parents, families, pregnant women and children — are required to stand for hours or sit on the floor for more than 3 or 4 hours on this service. All that is required to immediately fix this issue is a commitment of \$1.5 million to extend the rail platform and allow for additional carriages on the services. Considering the government has committed to spending \$30 million, when will the minister — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Purcell, can you get to the question? You are already over time.

Mr PURCELL — When will the minister care for the safety of train travellers between Warrnambool and Melbourne and allocate the \$1.5 million?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank Mr Purcell for his question. The Andrews Labor government is getting on with delivering for regional Victorians. Rather than waiting, our first state budget included regional funding commitments in public transport of at least \$554 million. This includes \$257 million in new regional rail carriages and infrastructure for 21 V/Locity carriages and a maintenance and stabling yard at Waurn Ponds. These carriages will mean more services on more lines.

I note that Mr Purcell has specifically raised his concern about the Warrnambool line, and I know his view is

shared by others in the south-west. The Minister for Public Transport recently met with the Warrnambool council, as have I, and these issues were canvassed on that occasion. By the end of the year a regional network development plan will represent Public Transport Victoria's assessment of how regional train and coach services must evolve to meet the needs of passengers in the short, medium and long term. Community consultation will play an integral role in the development of this plan, and in coming months the government and Public Transport Victoria will liaise with local communities, councils and passengers to explore opportunities for adding and improving public transport services and infrastructure in rural and regional Victoria.

Supplementary question

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I thank the minister for that and acknowledge her response with regard to the regional network development plan, which the government is putting together and which will focus on the rail gaps in regional areas. I ask the minister when this plan will be completed.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank Mr Purcell for his further question. I indicate to Mr Purcell that the regional network development plan will have a strong focus on the gaps in rail and other public transport in regional areas. It will set out priorities in the short term and medium term and indeed signpost areas for investment and infrastructure over the next 20 to 30 years.

There has been a network development plan for metropolitan rail in the past, but this will be the first time that there will be something equivalent for regional Victoria. This will enable us to move away from ad hoc service improvements towards a more coordinated approach and better integration between our public transport services in regional Victoria. The plan will consider infrastructure upgrades, network extensions and rolling stock. In response to Mr Purcell's question about timing, a regional transport advisory group with representatives from all regions will advise the government during the consultation process and drive engagement with communities and councils. That will begin next month.

Western distributor

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State regarding the western distributor project. The *Age* has this week highlighted that a similar length of road tunnel is being built by Transurban in western Sydney at half the price

of the western distributor proposal. My concern with this unsolicited road proposal is that it has not gone through and will not go through a competitive process with other companies, and it could very well be gold-plated to secure high-profit returns for Transurban. My question to the minister is: without a competitive process in place, how can we be convinced that the western distributor proposal is value for money for Victorian motorists and taxpayers, and what measures will the government introduce to ensure the integrity and accountability of the process?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Ms Hartland for her question. It is a good question. The government wholeheartedly acknowledges the validity of the concerns about and the scrutiny that should be brought to bear with regard to any proposal that comes forward to government. In this case it was a market-led proposal that Transurban brought to the incoming government to assess whether it was a unique project and whether the proponent was able to deliver an outcome which satisfied the very tests that the member outlined.

Some months ago the Treasurer outlined the Andrews government's interim arrangements in relation to market-led proposals. That process outlined that there would be scrutiny and value-for-money assessment that is made within the process. That is exactly what has happened. What has happened with this project and what has been announced by the government is that the proposal has satisfied the test of moving from assessment stage 2 to stage 3. That decision to allow it to proceed to stage 3 was supported by independent scrutiny that the government sought. It was not only the consideration of Treasury. The government asked Kerry Schott and Tony Canavan to have a look at whether the proposal stacked up and whether it had merit to proceed to stage 3. That is exactly where the government's consideration of that matter is now.

In terms of the cost structures, the way in which it is funded, the way in which it satisfies the public sector comparator and the way in which it could, if selected, enter a competitive environment in relation to its proceeding through the process, that is exactly what is occurring in stage 3. Exactly the tests that are outlined in the market-led framework that was announced by the Treasurer are being conducted. Have a look at those public documents released by the government some months ago. The government is undertaking that assessment currently.

Supplementary question

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — The minister spoke about stage 1 and stage 2 and this project going on to stage 3. Have the documents been released, or when will the documents be released, for stage 1 and stage 2 for public scrutiny?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I do not have the guidelines in front of me, but my memory tells me that by the stage that this goes to market or by the stage in which a public sector comparator is assessed by the government, there will be some consideration of the release of information that justifies its business case, it going to market, it being either accepted or rejected by the government and contractual arrangements being entered into. The member can go back to the guidelines and have a look at that clear process that is outlined in the framework that was released by my colleague the Treasurer. My estimate would be in March, but somewhere within that time frame.

Ordered that answers be considered next day on motion of Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan).

Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. By what date has the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Chris Eccles, been asked to report back to the Premier in relation to his inquiry into alleged bullying by Minister Somyurek?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The time frame for the conclusion of the investigation, to my knowledge, has not absolutely been confirmed by the secretary of the department, who is to make that determination on the basis of advice from those who are charged with undertaking various elements of that investigation. As the Premier indicated on Saturday, it will be weeks rather than months. It still is weeks. I would anticipate the resolution of this matter in June, but in fact this is a matter for the secretary to provide advice to the Premier on. That advice will also be shared with me. The instant I am able to share it with the community, I will be totally happy to.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Given the potentially short, albeit undefined, time frames for the inquiry, has Minister Somyurek already

provided either written or verbal advice and evidence to the inquiry?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will allow the minister to answer, but I am a little concerned that, frankly, the supplementary question is outside the substantive question by, in my view, probably a fair margin. I think it is quite separate to the substantive question; however, I will let the minister comment on that question. He might be mindful of what I have said if he wishes.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Thank you for your caution in relation to this, President. What I am mindful of is that it is outside of my responsibility, because in fact I am not undertaking the investigation. I am neither seeking nor obtaining evidence. That investigation is being undertaken independently by the secretary, and the secretary is the only person at this point in time who would be able to answer that question. It is not part of my responsibilities, nor would I seek it to be.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I indicate that I may not be so lenient on supplementary questions in future if members do not take this one as a caution. As I said, I believe that supplementary question went to new matters which had very little to connect them with the substantive question on that occasion.

Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is also to the Leader of the Government. Yesterday during question time the minister outlined that he had discussed the reported allegations concerning Minister Somyurek with the Premier on Thursday evening. Between when the minister was first notified on Thursday evening and Saturday lunchtime, which other cabinet ministers did he discuss the allegations with?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — None.

Supplementary question

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for that very succinct answer. Who initially informed the minister of the allegations on Thursday evening?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The answer to that question is the Premier's chief of staff.

Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is also to the Leader of the Government. Can the minister outline who first informed Minister Somyurek of the allegations of bullying made against him?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — In the line of questioning put to me yesterday and again today I do not necessarily accept the description of what allegations were raised in the original complaint or discussed with Minister Somyurek. My clear understanding of the sequence of these issues being raised with him occurred on Saturday morning.

Supplementary question

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — Were details of the allegations provided in detail at that time?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I think all of us should assume that, given the relevant matters in relation to this investigation and the circumstances behind a minister being stood down to allow the investigation, the answer is obviously yes.

Workplace bullying

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is also to the Leader of the Government. Could the minister, as Leader of the Government, detail the full process that occurs when a verbal grievance about workplace bullying in a ministerial office is received by the Premier's office?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The process involves being respectful of Victorian law, of obligations under WorkCover legislation, of occupational health and safety matters, in terms of the codes of conduct that apply to ministers' offices and to the way public service activity is undertaken. People need to be sure that they are mindful of the opportunities and the rights afforded to them under those various interlocking procedures, and they are encouraged to pursue them appropriately.

Supplementary question

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I would not exactly call that a clear explanation of the process, so perhaps I will ask further questions. In addition to the legislation that the minister mentioned, being mindful of this legislation, there a number of government procedures that address bullying in the workplace, including the public sector standards

commissioner's *Tackling Bullying* policy, the Victorian Public Sector Commission's *Managing Poor Behaviour in the Workplace* policy and the ministerial code of conduct. Which, if any, of these procedures were used when the verbal complaint was made on Thursday afternoon regarding Minister Somyurek's behaviour?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Whole ranges of assumptions have been made about what relevant frameworks should or should not apply to this investigation. I am indicating to members that the relevant and appropriate ones were. I am not confirming the application of any of the frameworks that the member has outlined.

SPC Ardmona

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Regional Development. Last Friday the Premier opened the new snack pack line at SPC, which was made possible by the Napthine government's \$22 million co-investment with SPC. During the press conference at this event Premier Andrews was asked about future co-investment opportunities with SPC. The Premier's answer was an unequivocal, 'Absolutely; count us in'. Given the Premier's answer, will the minister guarantee that funds from the regional development fund will automatically be allocated to SPC for future requests?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — It is so lovely to have a question from the Liberal Party on this portfolio. I do not think it has happened since February.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms PULFORD — I will resist the temptation to take up all the interjections. As Ms Lovell may have noticed, there is a new approach to industry policy in this state. We have a new department that brings together all of the economic levers — transport, roads, freight, agriculture, regional development and others — to reboot the Victorian economy after the last four years. There are a number of funds that will support investment in industry and growing Victorian industry.

The government has identified six key industry sectors in which it believes Victoria is ready to lead the world, with the right support, and the food and fibre industry is one of those. With all the bias everyone would expect of an agriculture minister and a regional development minister, I would say that is the most important of the six, though some of my colleagues might prefer to pick one of the other five.

We have the Premier's Jobs and Investment Fund with \$508 million, the Future Industries Fund with \$200 million and the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund with \$500 million, which has a \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund component, which we talked about at length in the house last night. We would be very keen to work with SPC, as we would with all regional Victorian employers who are interested in having a discussion with us about expansion.

Supplementary question

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — It appears the Premier's words may have misled our community. On Monday the *Shepparton News* reported that the Premier's statement was a statement of purpose, not a 'We'll see', 'We'll review it', or 'We'll think about it'. Now the minister is saying, 'We'll work with them; we'll consider things'. I ask the minister: exactly what will the process be for bids by SPC for further funding?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I take the opportunity to inform Ms Lovell that the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund will commence on 1 July, which means it has not commenced yet. The guidelines for the application of those funds will be released in coming weeks in advance of 1 July. If the member had been here for the debate last night on the legislation that provides the framework for the fund, she would have heard that.

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, President, the minister may have just misled the house by saying, 'If the member had been here'. I was here for the debate. I contributed to the debate.

Ms PULFORD — On the point of order, President, I take the opportunity to correct my statement. The part of the debate I was referring to was the detailed consideration during the committee stage on the legislation last night. That is when we discussed this at some length.

The PRESIDENT — Order! They are not points of order, but I hope everyone is satisfied.

Election commitments

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I direct a question without notice to the Leader of the Government. The Premier was reported in the *Age* the day after the election as saying:

Work will begin tomorrow because I will not waste even a single day delivering on each of the commitments we made.

I ask the minister: does the government still stand by this promise to deliver on each and every commitment made to the communities of Victoria?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I have no option. I am committed to an answer of yes, and I look forward with some anticipation to the supplementary question.

Supplementary question

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I welcome the opportunity to put a supplementary question to the Leader of the Government. The Labor candidate for the Assembly seat of Bass, Mr Sanjay Nathan, was quoted in the *South Gippsland Sentinel-Times* on 25 November 2014 matching the \$21 million commitment made by the coalition to rebuild the Wonthaggi Secondary College, stating:

Out of the \$510 million, Wonthaggi will be built and so will Koo Wee Rup.

The Wonthaggi and Koo Wee Rup communities feel incredibly let down that this promise has not been honoured. Will the minister put the minds of these communities at rest and confirm that the promises made by Mr Nathan will be honoured?

Ms Shing — On a point of order, President — it is predictable, but it is relevant — the statement made by Mr O'Donohue that communities feel incredibly let down about this promise not being fulfilled is not factually correct. It is just not correct. He is misleading the house.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order. It was a nice little debate, but no point of order.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Whilst in theory I was the beneficiary of time in relation to gathering my thoughts to answer this question, my answer will be exactly the same. Labor stands by the commitments it made at the election. The foundation of the commitments we will deliver during this term is *Labor's Financial Statement*. If there is a commitment that is within *Labor's Financial Statement* for the project as the member has described, then it will be fully acquitted. If it is not within *Labor's Financial Statement*, then it may be a matter we may consider during the life of this Parliament to see whether it is worthy of consideration at a future point in time.

Ordered that answers be considered next day on motion of Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria).

Mr Ondarchie — President, I raise a point of order in relation to a matter I raised yesterday with the Leader of the Government about a question I have asked on many occasions, as you are aware, about the 2015 Easter Sunday public holiday and the costs associated with it. Following my request yesterday you directed that the government provide a full answer by 11.45 this morning. I thank Mr Jennings, the Leader of the Government, who provided that answer yesterday afternoon, not right on the death knock of 11.45 a.m.

However, within the answer we have gone back to before Mr Somyurek's last generalist answer, when you directed him to give a more fulsome answer in writing. Now I have a response from the Leader of the Government that takes us back, because it is even more general than the one before. It leads us to one of two conclusions about the costs to Victoria of the 2015 Easter Sunday public holiday. Either the government is incompetent and does not know the answer, or it is refusing to tell the people of Victoria what the true cost was. President, I ask you to direct the government to provide a full answer in writing by 11.45 tomorrow morning.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will rule on that shortly.

First of all I indicate that I have also received a request from Mr Young for a further response from the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, on behalf of a minister in another place, in respect of the costs associated with gun licences. Mr Young has received quite a comprehensive response in respect of a substantive question he asked on 7 May.

Mr Young has requested that I seek a further response from the minister in respect of the supplementary question to that substantive question, which also dealt with licensing matters. I have perused the record, and it is my view that on that occasion I did not direct the minister to give a further response to the supplementary question. In fact I thought the answer he gave to that supplementary question on the day discharged the matter. I did not provide a direction at the time and will therefore not reinstate the question or seek a further answer from the minister on this occasion.

I have also received a request from Ms Patten to consider a question she put to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, acting on behalf of the Minister for Planning, in respect of the Abbotsford Convent receiving relief from the congestion tax applied to its car park. I note that the minister has provided a fairly comprehensive answer to Ms Patten. The answer outlines a number of initiatives that are

supportive of the Abbotsford Convent, but I concur with Ms Patten's view that a direct response as to whether the convent may be excused or may receive some other support directly in respect of the congestion tax has not been addressed. To that extent I will reinstate that substantive question. The supplementary question was adequately answered, but I hope the substantive question asked by Ms Patten on 5 May and pertaining to the congestion tax might be dealt with by the Minister for Planning. I give 48 hours for his response.

Mr Jennings — President, I ask for clarification on the matter you have just concluded. I am seeking clarification because it sounded to me from the way you described this unresolved matter that it is an adjournment item in that the nature of it was to ask for some action to be taken as distinct from asking for an explanation of something that has happened. That is the issue I want made crystal clear, that you are not supporting any member obtaining a particular outcome of their preference through a question as distinct from obtaining clarification on something that has occurred.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is true. The question was:

... will the government provide Abbotsford Convent with an exemption from the congestion levy?

From my point of view the minister ought to be able to say yes or no. I understand the context for that yes or no is that the minister has outlined for Ms Patten a number of other initiatives supporting the Abbotsford Convent, but I would have thought that question specifically could have been reasonably answered.

In regard to the question from Mr Ondarchie, I am having some difficulty dealing with his point of order. I had requested an answer in the first instance from the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, and then, as Mr Ondarchie correctly said, yesterday I followed up on the matter because an answer had not been lodged. We now have an answer courtesy of the Special Minister of State. I understand that Mr Ondarchie does not believe his question has been addressed in an apposite way in so much as the question asked for a sum of money or a cost associated with Easter Sunday trading. Though a range of explanations on budgetary processes have been provided, that cost has not been highlighted and therefore the answer is not satisfactory.

However, I am really in the hands of the house in terms of this answer. The power I have does not enable me to require a further answer to this matter in respect of its responsiveness to the question. Mr Ondarchie has

drawn some conclusions from the answer he has received, and he is entitled to draw those conclusions in the absence of a figure being provided. It would have been my belief that a figure or an estimate could have been arrived at to satisfy Mr Ondarchie's question — indeed I read from time to time in news reports a number of estimates associated with various activities. That obviously would have been helpful to Mr Ondarchie and no doubt to the house, but I am not in a position to request a further response from the minister in that respect. To some extent, with Mr Somyurek not being available at this time, I am not able to pursue that matter with him as the primary source of that information. On this occasion the Special Minister of State has provided an answer as a courtesy to the house after the matter was followed up.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

The PRESIDENT — I will deal with two questions on notice from Ms Patten. One of them is question 507, which asked the Special Minister of State representing the Premier, about some media training details. I must say that the answer is far from comprehensive. It is a neat paragraph, but I do not think it goes to the questions that Ms Patten legitimately asked. Therefore I will reinstate question 507.

I also have a request from Ms Patten to consider question 526, which was also to the Special Minister of State in his role representing the Premier, and that was in regard to the employment of advisers on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning Victorians and appointment dates. Again I have sought some advice from the clerks as to their thinking on this question, and on balance we have decided that this question also ought to be reinstated for a further response.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 493, 508–10.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Northern Victoria Region

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. We have a history of commercial fishing problems in Corio and Port Phillip Bay. In 1997 scallop fishing in Port Phillip Bay was shut down after dredging methods depleted populations and stock. Recently a licence has been issued to establish a niche hand-harvested commercial scallop

fishery with strict rules. One of those restrictions is a 12-tonne quota per year, and there are further restrictions on locations of the harvest and harvest methods. Sustainable methods of harvest and quota capping have ensured a consistent harvest since 1997. What view does the government take on maintaining a sustainable scallop catch, and what methods are in place to ensure this?

Western Victoria Region

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water and relates to the stakeholder consultation process arising out of the government's release of the report entitled *Review of Performance Targets for Bushfire Management on Public Land* by the inspector-general for emergency management. The review recommended that Victoria move from a hectare-based fuel reduction target to a risk-based fuel reduction target. I would like the minister to advise me about the consultation process generally and also as it relates more specifically to my electorate of Western Victoria Region.

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Local Government. In January the City of Greater Dandenong voted to propose to sell part of Glendale Reserve in Springvale. The City of Greater Dandenong has previously sold off public open space without replacing it with an equivalent purchase in the same area.

A large part of Ericksen Gardens was sold in the mid-2000s to build the new Springvale police station, and the City of Greater Dandenong never fulfilled its promise to purchase replacement land. This is despite the council's open space strategy identifying that Springvale has one-third of the open space it needs. My question to the minister is: why is the Andrews government allowing the City of Greater Dandenong to sell open space in areas like Springvale without requiring it to purchase replacement open space in the immediate area?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Attorney-General. There are few things more distressing for a parent than watching their child suffer. Parents will go to any lengths to assist their children in accessing the best and most effective medical treatment. This makes it all the more disturbing that there is potential for parents to be prosecuted for

administering to their children what is in many cases a lifesaving treatment in the form of medicinal cannabis.

I commend the government on referring the issue of medicinal cannabis to the Victorian Law Reform Commission, with the expectation of positive law reform on this issue by the end of this year. Until this time, parents in my region, whom I have met, and the 100 or so families around Victoria who administer this treatment to their children are vulnerable to very serious prosecution. My question is: will the minister issue a legal amnesty for the parents of very sick children who are currently using medicinal cannabis as part of their medical treatment?

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question relates to the absence of a budget allocation for the extension of Melbourne's tram network. Of particular interest to the people of Eastern Metropolitan Region is the absence of funding for the 6.8-kilometre extension of the no. 75 tram line to the busy shopping hub of Knox City. This particular route currently ends on Burwood Highway in Vermont South.

The extension of this tram line to the major activity hub of Knox City would connect the Docklands tram service to no less than 12 bus routes servicing Knox City and the local community. This is but one example of a cost-effective tram route extension, which along with many others, will encourage public transport patronage, thereby easing road congestion while capitalising on public transport connections at Knox City to deliver much better public transport solutions for the outer east.

Will the Minister for Public Transport consider extending the no. 75 tram route to Knox City to improve connectivity for people in the east?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and it relates to Broadmeadows State Emergency Service (SES), where controller Shane Lapworth and his more than 70 volunteers do a fantastic job in supporting Victorians in Melbourne's north.

The issue is that the SES has been in its building off Mahoneys Road for 24 years. It is right next door to a brand-new IKEA development. The front of the property is owned by a developer who intends to develop it within the next two years. What is likely to

happen is that the SES facility will be landlocked, and officers will not be able to get in and out of the building because of the development around them.

The Broadmeadows SES has been advised that there is no money in the SES budget for development, so I request that the minister quickly visit the Broadmeadows SES — which gets over 1200 requests for assistance each year — and find a financial and physical solution to help it with its urgent relocation needs.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Could Mr Ondarchie rephrase the last part of his question, if indeed he did call for an action?

Mr ONDARCHIE — Yes, I did, President. My constituency question for the minister was: could she present to me a solution for a physical and financial relocation for the Broadmeadows SES.

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on behalf of the residents of Eltham, and I ask: could the minister detail a plan for the upgrade of Bolton Street? This has been a longstanding matter of concern to the residents of Eltham, who have raised a number of questions with me. What will the \$10.6 million which has been committed actually build or change for the road? What process will occur in the planning phase? What consultation will occur with councils, local residents, relevant businesses and stakeholders? What is the timetable for both full funding — only \$300 000 has been provided — and completion of the changes the delivery of which has been committed to? I would appreciate it if the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, in detailing the plan for the upgrade of Bolton Street, could address my constituents' concerns in his answer.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I indicate again that constituency questions must be phrased as a question and not as the seeking of an action. The point the member has made is 'could the minister consider'. I may be being pedantic, but that is not quite a question; it is more the seeking of an action. I was distracted at the time, but I think Mr Ondarchie also called for an action rather than posing a question.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE — My question was: could the minister detail the plan for the upgrade of Bolton Street? That is what I asked him to do. I then outlined some questions that residents would like answered in that detail.

Northern Victoria Region

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Regional Development, and it is regarding the revitalisation of the Shepparton central business district. Constituents in Greater Shepparton have raised concerns with me that the revitalisation of the CBD, which is a major priority for Shepparton, has now stalled due to the lack of a funding commitment from the Andrews Labor government.

The revitalisation project commenced under the coalition government. It supported stage 1 works and made an election commitment of \$2.5 million to support ongoing improvements. However, Labor failed to make a single election commitment for Shepparton or recognise the CBD revitalisation in this year's budget.

For regional towns like Shepparton to grow and prosper we need our city centres to be attractive for residents and visitors, and I ask: will the minister commit to funding the remainder of the important Shepparton CBD revitalisation?

Eastern Victoria Region

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a question for the Minister for Police, and it concerns the Somerville police station in my electorate. By way of background, at a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget estimates hearing the minister described how he became personally involved in community safety issues in Geelong. Also at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing, the Acting Chief Commissioner of Police said that no final decision about the opening of the Somerville police station had yet been made.

My question to the Minister for Police is: will he engage with the Western Port and Somerville communities to understand their community safety concerns and work with the Acting Chief Commissioner of Police to ensure that the \$16.3 million brand-new, coalition-procured, ready-to-open Somerville police station will open for public access, so the community can access it, rather than just being office space for members of Victoria Police?

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer to an announcement made by the Premier in Waurn Ponds on 1 May that the government would build a new train

maintenance and stabling yard at Waurm Ponds. The Napthine government invested \$26 million in a new, ultra-modern railway station at Waurm Ponds last year that provides 100 return rail services a week. It is a credit to the then Minister for Public Transport, Terry Mulder, the member for Polwarth in the Assembly, and the member for South Barwon in the Assembly, Andrew Katos, that the Napthine government delivered that station on time and on budget. My question is on behalf of a constituent who owns land west of the station, near the quarry, who is seeking confirmation from the government about what land will be required to accommodate the new stabling yard.

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Premier in his capacity as the acting Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. The federal opposition has recently announced that if elected next year, it will reintroduce a carbon tax. The western suburbs are the home of many small businesses, particularly small manufacturers, that would be dramatically and deleteriously impacted by any carbon tax. Will the Premier ensure that the Victorian government compensates small businesses in Melbourne's west in the event of such a tax being reimposed?

The PRESIDENT — Order! That exhausts the allowed number of constituency questions for today. On that basis, we will resume at 2 o'clock.

Sitting suspended 12.54 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

STANDING COMMITTEES

References

Debate resumed.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — Before question time and the lunch break I was talking about the need to give this reference to the economy and infrastructure committee so it can establish a number of facts surrounding the western T-intersection, particularly as it pertains to its impact on the western suburbs. It seems to me that one of the great traffic hassles of our city is the Hoddle Street–Eastern Freeway T-intersection. The western T-intersection would replicate that on the western side of Melbourne, so maybe the committee could examine this.

Why any government would want to do that, I do not know. If you have a total, unmitigated traffic disaster on one side of Melbourne, why would you want to replicate it on the other side? Is that what Labor calls

balance? You have to wonder about the intelligence of anybody who would put that proposal forward. This committee will have the opportunity to examine, in a meaningful manner, the realities of this proposal.

You have to remember that Transurban sees this as quite a win. In fact I was listening to the radio on Monday as I drove around my electorate when I heard an advertisement from Transurban telling me of the joys of the western T-intersection. I thought to myself, 'They must think they've died and gone to heaven. They must think they'll make an absolute killing on this thing', and the reality is that Transurban will make a killing. The tragedy is that Transurban will make a killing on this thing but it will not actually make life better for anybody.

Mr Barber — Don't pre-empt the inquiry!

Mr FINN — I am not pre-empting the inquiry. These are matters the committee can have a look at.

Mr Barber — It can examine the size of the killing!

Mr FINN — It can examine the size of the killing, because size does matter, as I am sure Mr Barber is only too aware. This is something the committee can examine, and it is very important that we examine it. If we have a situation where the government allows this inferior road to be built — and even cons the federal government into contributing to it — and we do not get any positive results and find ourselves in a situation where the motorists of Melbourne, and indeed Victoria, are paying tolls for an extra 20 years as a result of the construction of this road, then it is fair and reasonable that the Parliament examines that. It is a reasonable thing for a parliamentary committee to be able to call witnesses and examine in great detail the impact this will have on not just the people of the western suburbs but also people right around Victoria. I am not opposed to toll roads if they do the job. I have some severe reservations about people paying tolls on roads they do not use. That seems to me to be a very strange way of going about business.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr FINN — That could be the Labor way — to get people in the east to pay for a road on the other side of Melbourne that they will in all likelihood never use. That may well be the Labor way, but the tragedy is that I suspect this road and I believe this committee — —

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Dalidakis is getting very excited, and I can understand why, because I have heard that he

may have Transurban shares. I do not know. Perhaps that is something that the committee could examine as well. Is it on the register? I have not had a look at the register; I will have to have a look. But that is something that the committee could look at as well.

The fact of the matter is that the western T-intersection will resolve nothing as far as the traffic problems of the western suburbs are concerned.

Mr Barber — Tell us more.

Mr FINN — I will tell you more, Mr Barber, if we are able to get this to the committee. I am very happy to tell you more and to examine this at much greater length. As a member of the economy and infrastructure committee, I can assure Mr Barber that we will have a close look to see the benefits.

In his audition for the ministerial vacancy earlier, Mr Mulino pulled out all sorts of facts and figures on cost-benefit analyses, ratios and all sorts of things. Let me tell members that the people in the western suburbs do not care about cost-benefit analyses, ratios and what have you, they just want to get home. They just want to see their families. They just want to get to work. They do not want to continue to be faced with the traffic bedlam that they face on a daily basis.

Mr Herbert interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Herbert should come out to the western suburbs to have a look at what the people in the western suburbs have to put up. He would not even consider this proposal. In fact I would welcome Mr Herbert coming along to the committee as a witness and giving his personal endorsement of this project, even though he clearly has not the first idea about it. Perhaps that is the biggest thing that this committee can examine — why is the government even entertaining this project when it clearly is going to do nothing positive for anybody except Transurban? That is a big question that needs to be answered by this committee if this motion is passed.

I am hopeful that Mr Dalidakis and Mr Herbert will vote for this motion, because I think they will be very interested to get some answers on this as well. Clearly they have as many questions about this project as I do and as the rest of Victoria does. I invite them to support the motion moved by Ms Wooldridge to refer this matter for inquiry by the economy and infrastructure committee.

The western distributor in itself is one of the great mysteries of our time. A committee examination might

be able to come to some reality as to where we stand on this matter.

We then turn to the western metro rail project. This is a project that the government has really hung its hat on. It has not hung its money on it, but it has hung its hat on it. I suppose that is a start. I would be interested to know the exact economic impact of this project on business in the city, and an examination or an inquiry by the committee could look at that. I know that members opposite do not give a stuff about small business. That is a fact. Labor has never cared about small business and it never will care about small business.

The government is saying that it is going to dig up the centre of the city of Melbourne and that it does not care what happens to the small businesses that will be impacted by this project. That is a slap in the face to those family businesses who employ people. They make up the engine room of our economy. Without small business the country would collapse, but Labor does not care about that. It is particularly important that this committee examines the impact that this project will have on those businesses in the city of Melbourne.

The Melbourne Metro rail project was adopted by the Labor Party because it was different from the one that the coalition put forward. That is the bottom line. One of the main reasons the coalition did not go ahead with the proposal that the Labor Party is advancing is for the very reason that I have raised today. It would deleteriously affect small business and other businesses right through the city of Melbourne.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr FINN — But that is not something that will ever concern the Labor Party. The jobs that will be lost and the small businesses that will go under are not something that will ever concern the Labor Party, because it does not care about small business.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, I am finding it really hard to hear anything over the incessant interjections of Mr Philidakis, and I am on the same side of the house as Mr Finn. I ask you to ask him to give members a go and consider modifying his behaviour. This chamber welcomes an occasional interjection that is intelligent. But his ongoing harassment does not add to the democratic workings of this chamber.

Mr Herbert — On the point of order, Acting President, in his contribution Mr Finn made the point

that size does matter. When it comes to volume, anyone would know that no-one can outspoke Mr Finn. I could hear him very well.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! There were interjections, but at the same time Mr Finn was inviting interjections from the other side. Mr Finn is entitled to be heard in silence. Mr Finn should address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr Dalidakis — On a separate point of order, Acting President, given Mrs Peulich represents herself as the shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I suggest to her that ‘Dalidakis’ is not a difficult name and she should pay more respect to people with an ethnic background.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! We all know we should address members with a title, such as ‘Mr’, and a surname. I thank Mr Dalidakis. Mr Finn to continue.

Mr FINN — There are ratbags everywhere.

Mrs Peulich — What are you today? What cultural background are you today?

Mr FINN — Let us not start that, because this could get very nasty. This bloke over here, he could be anything he wants to be. The comedian of Spring Street. It is a marvellous thing. I wish I could do it; it would be very handy.

I am very concerned about the economic impact this project will have on small businesses and on jobs in the city of Melbourne in particular. The centre of our capital city faces devastation as a result of this project, and a parliamentary inquiry conducted by the economy and infrastructure committee would go some way towards unearthing — if you will pardon the pun — the effects of this project.

I move on to the sale or lease — or both — of the port of Melbourne. The Labor Party likes to say there is bipartisan support for this project, and it has to be said that to a degree there is bipartisan support. However, we know that any major sale of this nature will be stuffed up by the Labor Party. Labor members have the form and the runs on the board when it comes to this sort of matter.

When you are talking about large sums of money, whether it be for the sale or the lease of something the size of the port of Melbourne, you will have a fair idea that they will mess it up. It is important that we have somebody keeping an eye on this particular sale or lease. In relation to this probably more so than in

relation to anything else listed in this motion, it is extremely important that the economy and infrastructure committee be in a position to keep an eye on the sale or lease of the port of Melbourne. Already there is a great deal of scepticism about the ability of this government to get it right.

Anybody who has seen the Labor Party in action over an extended period of time knows that Labor cannot handle money, and with this project we are talking about a particularly large sum of money. I am almost tempted to amend this motion to seek to provide the economy and infrastructure committee with the ability to provide oversight of the sale or lease of the port of Melbourne, because quite frankly this government does not have the ability to get it right. Already, after just six months, and at a time when most governments are still in their honeymoon period, the people in the streets, in the suburbs, in the regions and in the country areas are saying, ‘Dear God, what have we done? What have we got here?’. You fear to think what will happen by the time the Labor Party has finished with the port of Melbourne.

I think it particularly important that we allow the economy and infrastructure committee to examine this area, and I can see that Mr Barber would be particularly keen to have a look at this proposal. He would be very interested indeed, as would I. As members of Parliament we have a responsibility to protect the interests of the people of this state, and sometimes we have to protect the people of this state from their own government, and this motion is about doing just that.

I move on to the Melbourne Airport rail link. I remember that back in 1999 I was the member for Tullamarine in the other place. We went to an election — and I have to say it probably was not the best election campaign we have ever run. I remember only too well that Steve Bracks, the then Leader of the Opposition, made the big statement, the big promise. ‘Under a Bracks government’, he said, ‘there will be a rail link to Melbourne Airport. We will build the rail link to Melbourne Airport.’. That was 16 years ago. I remember shortly after that election he went the Ernie Sigley and said, ‘Only joking!’. Just months, perhaps even weeks, after the election he said, ‘You know that rail link we were going to build to the airport? Only joking!’.

We should remember that. It was a historic moment, because of all the broken promises and of all the lies of the Labor Party in that period, the very first one was on the airport rail link. Before the election Labor Party members had promised, swearing dutifully with their hands on their breasts, that they would build the airport

rail link, and immediately after the election they changed their minds and said it was not going to happen. Here we are, 16 years down the track, and Melbourne is the only major airport in Australia without a rail link. That is quite extraordinary.

As some members would be aware — you might even be aware of this, Acting President — I do not live far from the airport, and every day I see the increasing length of the queues of people wanting to get into the airport. We have seen the queues extend down Mickleham Road and beyond because there is no other way to get there.

A few weeks ago the SkyBus broke down on the Tullamarine Freeway. It is basically the only ‘public transport’ that allows people to get to the airport and it broke down, creating absolute havoc. We have a situation where we have an airport with increasing patronage that is proving to be a very attractive alternative to both Sydney and Brisbane airports and people cannot get there with any sort of efficiency.

The coalition government said last year that if it was re-elected, a rail link would be built. Sadly that re-election did not occur. The new Labor government has thrown the people who use the Tullamarine Freeway to get to Melbourne Airport to the wolves. To the people who use the Tullamarine Freeway to get to the airport, many on a daily basis, the Labor Party has said, ‘We don’t particularly care. You’re not a priority’.

I raised this matter with the Minister for Public Transport just recently, and her response was, ‘This is not a priority’. I reckon the first thing the economy and infrastructure committee should examine is why a rail link to the airport is not a priority for this government, because it should be. This city is trying to sell itself as a gateway to Australia and is setting itself up as an alternative to Sydney — with very good reason because I think we have a far better airport than Sydney — but it is impossible to be successful in that sale without a rail link.

I speak to people from interstate and some from overseas and they are just staggered that Melbourne does not have a rail link to the airport. In 1999 Labor said it would build the rail link and then stopped it. Now Labor has stopped it for the second time. For the second time Labor has scuttled the airport rail link. That is a disgrace. However, you could not expect much more from these people. It is woolly thinking, to say the very least. Perhaps that is another thing the committee could examine. Where are these people’s heads? What are they thinking? To quote Dr Phil, ‘What were you

thinking?’. What were they thinking when they decided that an airport rail link was not a priority?

I do not think there are too many things the state needs more than an airport rail link. It is needed desperately. Since the privatisation of Melbourne Airport we have seen a doubling, even a tripling, of the number of people who work there, and that in itself has put a huge strain on the freeway. A number of people have to drive to work there because they have no other option. If we had a rail link, not only could commuters going interstate and overseas visitors benefit from it but the people who work at the airport would be able to take advantage of it as well.

The fact that we need this rail link seems to me to be a no-brainer. I think the economy and infrastructure committee should have the ability to ask, firstly, why we do not have one, and, secondly, why will we not be getting one? From my perspective as a member for Western Metropolitan Region there is deep disgust throughout much of the western suburbs that Labor cancelled this project. To disgust some of Labor’s strongest supporters takes a fair bit, but in my view this is that fair bit we are talking about.

I move on to the second part of Ms Wooldridge’s motion, which reads:

- (2) to the environment and planning committee as part of its oversight of Local Government Victoria, to inquire into and report every six months on the outcome of the state government policy of local government rate capping on councils’ viability, service impacts on local communities and impacts on the provision of local infrastructure ...

If you speak to any number of people in local government in this state, they will tell you that this government is round the twist. It thinks that rate capping is going to work, but members might recall that the coalition tried it some years ago and it did not work then. What makes this government think it is going to work now? It makes no sense at all to try something that you know is not going to work. Maybe the Labor way is to go with your eyes open into another disaster. Maybe that is the Labor way.

We are talking about councils’ viability. We heard from Mr Mulino in his audition earlier today that councils are providing numerous — dozens, almost hundreds — of services. It may well be that as a result of this rate capping those services will have to be significantly curtailed. I have to say that that might not be such a bad thing in certain instances. I see some of my local councils out in the west doing certain things, and I look at them, shake my head and think, ‘What the hell are they doing that for? I would not have thought that was

the job of council'. From that point of view it may have a positive impact.

What we need to do, via the environment and planning committee, is have an opportunity to examine how this is going and the impact it is having on the lives of Victorians. It is something that will impact on many Victorians. For example, it may impact you if you have a dog or cat. I have two cats and a dog; I may have mentioned that to the house before. This rate capping may well impact on pet owners, because you have ranger services and you have registration services. It is not just rate capping.

Ms Shing — What? You just want to talk about animals!

Mr FINN — I do not mind talking about animals. I love Bobbidog, and I have a great photo taken today of my cats, Kentucky and Yoda, sleeping cuddled up together to warm themselves because of the cold. But I digress.

Mr Drum — Not Bobo and Boo?

Mr FINN — No, not Bobo and Boo. They buggered off.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! Through the Chair, Mr Finn. This is not the time to have a conversation.

Mr FINN — Thank you, Acting President. These are areas that will be impacted by this rate capping, because what we are going to see is councils finding other ways to raise money. If there is one thing that councils can do well, it is raise money, and they will put up cat and dog registrations. They will put fees for any number of services up to cover the shortfall, because one thing they will not do is cut their empires; they do not want to do that. Although clearly, as I said earlier, some services will have to go. We will need some degree of checks and balances on how this process continues.

This section of the motion would have huge support in the local government community. Of the councillors I have met with whom I have discussed this matter — whether they be Independent, Labor, Greens or whatever they might be — I have not met a single one who supports Labor's policy. Each of the councillors I have spoken to — to a man and a woman — has said to me that they think Labor's policy is insane. They think Labor's policy is cheap vote chasing and is unsustainable for local government. That is what local councillors have told me, and I have to say I would take that as gospel given the wide breadth of support for that

view right across the political spectrum of local government.

If this motion were passed today, we would see a queue of councillors and council officers lining up to give evidence to the environment and planning committee on this matter, because it will impact on councils in particular and it will impact on people's lives in so many different ways. I could list them all, but I will not do that. If I were auditioning for a vacant ministerial job, I might do that, but given that Mr Mulino has beaten me to it, I will leave it alone.

Let me say that I think it is very important — —

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr FINN — Ms Shing should consider this. She should learn a little bit about local government.

Ms Shing — I am always learning, Mr Finn.

Mr FINN — I think learning is a very good thing. Despite what you might hear about the sides being settled, these things are never settled because learning is an ongoing experience.

We could learn a great deal from this committee and the examinations undertaken by it, because once the rate capping is implemented and this policy is applied to councils in this state, we are going to see a lot of trouble from one end of Victoria to the other. Whether it be in country councils or metropolitan ones, wherever they may be, we are going to see some big trouble, and we are going to need a committee to keep an eye on it. This motion is necessary to keep a check on the damage I believe this policy will do to local government and to services in Victoria.

I move on to paragraph (3) of the motion, which seeks that the legal and social issues committee inquire into, consider and provide an interim report no later than 30 November 2015, and a final report no later than 1 May 2016, on the process, cost and effectiveness of the Victorian government departmental restructure — the machinery of government changes — following the November 2014 election.

I am surprised the government is opposing this section of the motion. I would have thought that more than anybody the people who would benefit from it would be members of the government, because clearly they have no idea how this worked or how it works now. They are sitting over there in cloud-cuckoo-land. I could make a comment about an artificially inseminated cow, where you know that something wonderful has happened but you are not quite sure what

or how. That is just like government members. They know that something wonderful has happened but they are not sure what or how. That is why the legal and social issues committee would help them enormously in understanding what happened under the leadership of the Premier immediately following the 2014 election.

This motion requires that an interim report be provided no later than 30 November this year. I think that is a fair and reasonable thing given that that would be almost 12 months to the day since the government took office. Following that, a final report is to be provided no later than 1 May 2016, which would allow for a much more comprehensive report to be put together.

There is no doubt that the government has made huge and significant changes to the culture of government in this state and those changes are somewhat of a mystery to a good number of people in the bureaucracy and indeed in the Parliament, and I am not talking about people on this side of the house. As I say, I believe it would be very helpful for the government, it would be very helpful for the bureaucracy and it would be very helpful for academics, who study these sorts of things, God help them, to understand exactly what has occurred and have a look at what benefits or otherwise have resulted from these changes.

Ms Shing — Tell us.

Mr FINN — This will shock Ms Shing, but I am not the repository of all wisdom. I can see the stunned look on her face, but it is true that I do not know everything, and that is why we need this reference to the legal and social issues committee so we can have a good hard look at what has basically been a revolutionary change made by this government.

Ms Shing — Revolution!

Mr FINN — I mentioned ‘revolution’ and her ears pricked up. She will be out on the streets in her hobnail boots any minute now. Significant changes have occurred over recent months in this state, and I think it is extremely important that we have an avenue to look at these things.

Mr Herbert — What are they?

Mr FINN — Mr Herbert is in the ministry. He might want to know how he got his portfolio. Some things will remain a mystery to him, like how he came to be there at all, but he will want to know about his department. He will want to know about his departmental chiefs and the bureaucrats who tell him what to do every day. They do run the show, it is true. Mr Herbert will want to know all about those sorts of

things, so this part of the motion is for him. It is almost as if the motion was written for Mr Herbert, Ms Shing and Mr Dalidakis, who seems to have nodded off over there, and a number of other government members who really do not have the first idea what has happened over the last few months.

The people of Victoria are looking at 1 Treasury Place and looking at what is happening in Parliament House, and they too are saying, ‘What is this government doing?’. It is not just the government that does not have a clue what it is doing, the people do not know what the government is doing. This reference will be helpful. I like to be helpful whenever I can. This motion adds to my reputation for being helpful, and that has to be a good thing. If we can get the terms of reference to the committees in order for them to examine these matters properly and with fulsome consideration, then we can come up with some answers that will — —

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr FINN — No, we are talking about what Ms Shing’s government has done. If she does not think that is of substance, that is her problem. I am trying to help Ms Shing and Mr Dalidakis because, as I said a moment ago, I am a helpful person. I am trying to help them understand what has happened within the machinations of government over the six months since Labor came to office. As I said, there are a lot of people who would like to know what has happened up this end of town.

Mr Dalidakis — Please tell them.

Mr FINN — That is what this committee is about. Mr Dalidakis has to start listening. If you want to learn things, you have to listen, and it would be helpful if Ms Shing could listen occasionally. This motion is an important one. It will root out a number of important issues with information surrounding — —

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr FINN — If Mr Dalidakis had been listening for the past hour, he would know exactly the substance of my argument. Would he like me to start again? Did he miss it? I am being distracted; I should never respond to interjections. This motion is one that will provide no end of enormously helpful information to this Parliament, perhaps to the government and certainly to the people of Victoria, and that is who we should be here to serve at all times. Our no. 1 priority should be the people who put us here.

Mr Morris — Not the unions.

Mr FINN — Not the unions. Members on the other side will tell us at length that their priority is their union bosses, but we on this side of the house know that the people of Victoria put their faith and trust in us when we come into this Parliament. The only way those on the other side can get into Parliament is with the trust and support of union hacks in a backroom somewhere. That is the truth, and nobody from the other side could justifiably deny it.

I commend this motion to the house. It is worthy of the support of every member of this house. If the motion is passed, I wish the economy and infrastructure committee, the environment and planning committee and the legal and social issues committee well in their deliberations. Today we have gone a long way towards shining a light on a government that over a period of months has got itself into a dark place. If we can illuminate the lack of good governance in this state by a government that has no idea what it is doing, then we have done a good job and a great service to the people of Victoria. I urge members to support the motion.

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — Goodness me, what a rant that was. I think I lost a year of my life listening to that contribution, so I will try to be a little more succinct. I sat and listened to what Mr Finn pretended was a contribution to the debate but which basically seemed to be a lecture. I had no idea Mr Finn was a university professor. He certainly likes to lecture, there is no doubt about that. This was a lecture from a member of a government that plunged this state and our manufacturing industry into crisis, that lost our car industry, that drove our finance sector to Sydney, that raised debt to astronomical levels, that left the legacy of a 6.8 per cent unemployment rate and that totally lost the faith of business and industry in this state. Yet 190 or so days later he has the gall to lecture us about economic management and the running of the state. Let us not forget the chaos of the Baillieu and Napthine years. What a disgrace. What gall the member opposite has standing there in his first year out of government lecturing anybody about good government. It is unbelievable.

My opposition to the motion relates particularly to paragraphs 1 and 2, and that is what I want to talk about — the first two references. Mr Finn highlighted in his contribution exactly what is wrong with this motion. I lost count of all the projects on his wish list that he thought should be referred to this committee. I got up to about 50 projects that he wants this committee to investigate; every whim, every wish he has ever had in his wildest dreams. Imagine, for every single member here, any wish we have being sent off to this

committee with no times, no limits and no constraints. Off goes the list, with every single nutty idea that every member of Parliament has. That is a great use of a committee system. I do not think the committees should be a smorgasbord of wish lists. They should do some real work for real outcomes.

I do not have a lot of experience, it is fair to say, with the Council's committee system, but I do with the parliamentary committee systems. I was chair of the inaugural Education and Training Committee from 2003 to 2006. Before I go any further, I notice that Mr Elasmarr is in the house and I want to congratulate him because he was a member of that committee when I was on it. I acknowledge the great contribution he made, and what a great choice he is as chair of the new committee, the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, which incorporates a lot of the features of the former Education and Training Committee. Working with Mr Elasmarr on that committee, hearing him when he speaks in Arabic or French and observing the statesmanlike manner with which he commands any audience was a revelation. I think he is an excellent choice as chair, and I look forward to reading some of the proper references that come out of the new committee and the proper work that comes from it.

The work of that committee highlights exactly what is wrong with these suggestions. A good committee should have proper terms of reference and it should have a time frame for delivering on them. There are a lot of members in this chamber whose major contribution to Victoria, to the operation of our state and to the improvement of our state will come through the committee system. It is a travesty when we try to distort that system for shallow political pointscoring, for a shallow witch-hunt, such as in the way we have seen this motion moved.

It is not just a reflection on the opposition as it puts its view of the committee system but also an insult to every hardworking member of this chamber who wants to make a difference, who wants to have a look at a proper reference, who wants to do some detailed research and some detailed work to get an outcome and make recommendations that government will accept, recommendations that will make a difference to people's lives. This is a witch-hunt that we have before us, shallow little pointscoring references without any end date, without any real guidance as to how to go about them, and a wish list designed to try to tie up the government through a committee system.

The other point about this is that there is no way you will ever get bipartisan support on these types of references. In my time on committees the members had

good references and we all sought to get an outcome regardless of our political party, whether it be the inquiry into the impact of unmet demand in higher education, the inquiry into the effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria, the inquiry into the promotion of maths and science education, the inquiry into the suitability of pre-service teacher training courses, the inquiry into skill shortages in the rail industry or the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in education.

These were inquiries on which we generally got bipartisan support, because we sat down with the former Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Peter Hall. When Nick Kotsiras, the former Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, was deputy chair and I was chair, we sat down and took the committee system seriously and we would work through the recommendations and produce a report that was actually meaningful and had proper outcomes, where we could get bipartisan support and get some really decent results coming out of it from government. That is what a committee system should be. The Hansard workers all understand that; I cannot understand why the Leader of the Opposition cannot understand that.

If you denigrate the committee system, you diminish a major arm of this institution and its capacity to look at major issues besetting our society. We need committees to come up with proper recommendations that governments can look at and can enact legislation on to get results for people. That is what committees should do, and that is what every member in this chamber who serves on a committee should be focusing on doing. It is also something that gives enormous personal satisfaction to the members on the committee, not these rubbish references that we have before us, this witch-hunt with no times, no details, just trying to use the committee system to get to the government.

I worked in the Senate for six years for a senator, and I did an awful lot of research on Senate inquiries, not just the budget inquiries, the budget estimates, additional budgets and supplementary budgets but in the standing committees and their references. I was there in the halcyon days of people such as Bronwyn Bishop, who used to love baiting public servants at hearings. She made her reputation on that. I can tell members that no-one in the Senate would put up with these types of references, no matter how feisty it got. Throughout the years when the Australian Democrats or the Greens had the balance of power, back in the time of Chamarette, Dee Margetts and Harradine, they would not have these sorts of shabby references. They would do references

that had outcomes about real issues, not the sort of party political rubbish that we see today.

In saying that, this is a landmark motion. People who vote for it will vote for a complete change to the way the committee system operates in this Parliament. Let us lift the game, not lower it. Let us lift the references, not lower them. Let us lift the participation levels of members here, not lower them. Let us lift the outcomes from our committee system, not lower them. These are the things we should all aspire to. These are things that are important in our lives and the reason people vote for us, and this motion will simply not do that.

Motions such as these are just about a long-term witch-hunt. To go there is time consuming, so they can be used as avenues to attack the government on every major project it undertakes. We have just heard from Mr Finn about an extraordinarily long list of projects which he will not raise in the adjournment debate, he will not raise in his 90-second members statements and he will not raise in debates in this house. He wants to see the whole committee system based around his wish list of projects for the western suburbs. That is really not good enough.

Let me go to the details of the first reference and unpick some of what this motion is about. We see listed for reference the projects related to the removal of railway level crossings. The removal of 50 of the worst congested level crossings in our state is a major infrastructure effort. In the past if we have been lucky we have removed one and a half or two level crossings in a year. That is why their removal has been so slow.

The projects linked with the lease of the port of Melbourne will generate 5000 jobs. That too is a massive infrastructure effort, which is just beginning. I have no problem with people looking at that in a few years to see how it is rolled out. It is ludicrous to ask a standing committee to consider that project when there are no details on how the committee members will consider it and on what terms — whether they will look at a contract, a rollout or the efficiency or business case. Having it rammed into a motion such as this is shabby at very best.

The motion is shabby too for all those people who want and hope to get their level crossings fixed and see business improve. I can tell members that this project is something that people in the business community are talking about. They want those level crossings removed, they want them done quickly and they want them done efficiently. That is the government's view as well.

Then we have the western distributor. We have just heard a rant and rave about the west. The western distributor is an incredibly important project and it is nothing new. These are all projects that we went to the election on. Members opposite did not like them, and that is okay. It is okay also that they have different views. But talk about sooky sooky la-la. Members opposite should get on with it and realise the mandate the government has and give the government a go to carry it out, rather than saying, 'We think the people of Victoria are wrong, wrong, wrong, so we're going to punish, punish, punish. We're going to be childish about this'. The western distributor is an important project and everyone knows it.

The Melbourne Metro rail project is part of the list. If there was a project that shows the difference between the previous government and our government, it is the Melbourne Metro rail project. Let us be clear, unlike the plethora of misinformation that was put just before. The Melbourne Metro rail project came from one of the most exhaustive studies of infrastructure needs that Victoria has ever had. Sir Rod Eddington was in charge of it. He spent an inordinate amount of time, he had expert advice, he consulted, he got every piece of the jigsaw together and he put forward a plan for Melbourne. Melbourne needs a transport plan, and it needs a rail and public sector plan. In the last eight years the population has grown by 1 million in this city, and in the next eight years there will be another million people. This is not the time to be banging on and saying, 'Sorry. We lost the election; we're going to be spoilsports'.

We need this rail project, which came out of exhaustive research. The former government did not like it. Let us be truthful about this. Those opposite had a view, and when they came to government they said they were not going to do anything the former government had proposed. They did not care that the research was done independently by experts and that it was the best option. They said they were not going to do that. When the political pressure built up about our rail system they had to do something, so what did they do? You can ask any public servant in the transport division what they did. The answer is that they quickly cobbled together a plan. They told their senior bureaucrats that they needed an alternative and asked them to pull something together quickly.

It was not the Eddington process, the independent view. They pulled together their shabby little plan for cutting the major part of growth in Melbourne out of the underground Melbourne Metro rail project. They pulled together a plan that put a major station in an area where there are no people. They could not even identify where

the station was to be. They had it in the wrong place on some maps. The Premier could not tell people where it was going to be, and neither could the planning minister. It was an absolute debacle. It was a hugely expensive made-up project that would never have swung. It would never have come together and it was never viable.

Now those opposite say they do not like the government's well-thought-out plan. They do not think there should be a station in the hospital and Melbourne University precinct. They do not care that Melbourne University is waiting to build a \$400 million building above the station at the Bayford site. They do not care about expanding in that direction to look after the infrastructure needs of our population. They do not care that there is no decent station next to that massive hospital area. None of that is of interest to them. Their interest was a shabby little deal because they did not like the plan Labor had.

Members of the government have a different view. Will the Melbourne Metro rail project cause disruption? Of course it will. Every major infrastructure project that this city ever undertakes causes disruption. Will we manage it? Of course we will. Will we have a plan to make sure that the Elizabeth Street component is done in an efficient manner that minimises disruption to business there? Of course we will.

The fanciful allegations made by members opposite are astronomical. We have just seen an entire subway built in New York, right down the middle of Fifth Avenue, from East Harlem down to Wall Street. New York can do it. It was a massive project. Every single crossroad had to be kept going during that underground dig and shunt. Those opposite are saying that we cannot do that. What a load of rubbish. Of course we can. There is any number of ways it can be done. The point is that governments can undertake infrastructure projects and minimise disruption. I would have thought that, regardless of this motion, the Greens would have been supporting this project, because it is an important project for all of Melbourne. I could go on more about it, because it is a fantastic project.

The list includes the sale and lease of the port of Melbourne. If anyone has been transparent about that, we have been. What we are doing is absolutely diametrically opposite to what happened with the opposition's plans for the sale of the port. Talk about a shabby little deal. There was no detail. It was stuck in a line in the budget because the figures were absolutely wrong. Freight was losing money left, right and centre, but members of the then government did not want to expose the public to the knowledge of the debt levels

they were chalking up. They did not want to come clean on the actual state of the budget that we inherited.

Their plan for leasing the port was not about using the money to get rid of the blight of level crossings that clog up this city and cause death on our roads and rail, that clog up not only the roads but also the rail, that are a major impediment to getting more trains on our network and getting a more efficient service and that are intrinsically linked with the Melbourne Metro rail project in the biggest upgrade to our transport system that we have seen since the original city loop was built. Those opposite did not want any of that. They just wanted a little line in their budget so that people were not aware of the disastrous state they drove the Victorian economy into.

Members of the government have a different view. Our plan is transparent. I lose track of the number of times that the Treasurer — who is doing an awesome job on this project, as he is with rebuilding Victoria's finances and the basic infrastructure that people rely on — comes out and provides clarity on our plans around the port. There are no secrets here. This is a transparent process.

Then we have the Melbourne Airport rail link. Listening to those opposite you would think they had actually intended to build it. You would think they were fair dinkum. They were not, of course. They were about as fair dinkum about that as they were about the Doncaster rail project that they talked about during an earlier election campaign. They had no intention of building it. They did not have the route it was going to go along. They would not give the options because they knew how many houses would be destroyed doing it. There were no costings. It was never ever going to be built. What was said? It was said that at best it was going to be built in 50 years. That was if they could find the money, if they could work out the route, if they could get through the politics of it all and if it stacked up against a very cheap, efficient SkyBus service. It absolutely astounds me.

What listening to the debate has taught me is that so many of those opposite never actually catch a train and they never get the SkyBus from the airport. I do, and I know that it is a damned good service. It takes 20 minutes.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr HERBERT — It is a generalisation. I should say that I am talking about those whose contributions I have heard in the chamber today. We are talking about a service which, if it happened — if there were funding

behind the rhetoric and the gobbledegook — would be at best 5 minutes faster than SkyBus. Going from my former seat in the other house, Eltham, on the Hurstbridge line on the train is half the distance to the airport, but on the projections the trip was going to take nearly twice as long. But there was no funding for the extra stabling facilities, for the two new projects that we were promised. The previous government said, 'We're going to build this fanciful rail link', but it had no intention of doing that, and everybody knows it, just like it had no intention of building the Doncaster rail link. It was about trying to stick a few markers in the ground.

I paraphrase Bob Marley, who sang that you have to know your history to know where you are going. We need to reflect on that history when we look at this motion. The Baillieu government was roundly criticised both inside and outside the Liberal-Nationals coalition for doing nothing and driving this state into a never-never land. That does not come from me; virtually every economic commentator and news reporter said so. That led to the change of leadership. Former Premier Denis Napthine came in, and he had to try to give the perception that something had changed in the flawed approach of the government, so he made wild announcements, behind which there was never any funding, detail or thought. The airport rail link was one of those projects.

This part of the motion is not just about the witch-hunt around major government projects or the wish list of matters those opposite would like to see directed to a committee, based on whatever the fad of the week is. This is about undermining some very legitimate processes that have been put in place by this government in terms of infrastructure investment and spend. We know that one of the problems in politics and for the community is the chopping and changing of governments. We believe there needs to be greater oversight and certainty. We believe we need to establish Infrastructure Victoria to take over the process of building this state's vital infrastructure, both for the people who live here now and for the further million who will join us in the next eight years. For our growth, prosperity and economic security we need to put this in the hands of experts for long-term planning. Infrastructure Victoria is the mob that should do that, underpinned by Projects Victoria, to bring some gravitas to how these projects roll out. That is the way a good modern state should do things.

This has nothing to do with parliamentary oversight. Of course there should be parliamentary oversight of those bodies, just as there are a range of oversights, including parliamentary oversights, over the Public Accounts and

Estimates Committee, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office and the Ombudsman. To compare this motion, which wants to have them overseen by a never-ending committee process — this witch-hunt picking up minutiae — to what should be the proper planning of this state's major infrastructure needs for generations to come through Infrastructure Victoria and Projects Victoria is frankly an insult to the Victorian people.

I will go on to the second part of the motion, which is also very simple: it is called a mandate, and it is called common sense. We went out and said, 'We have difficulty with the level of rate rises and the lack of scrutiny and oversight of rate rises coming out of local government'. In Nillumbik over one three-year period, rates went up about 34 per cent. In Banyule they went up about the same amount in a few years. No-one is saying that was inappropriate. What we are saying is that there was no oversight and no explanation for it. There was no reliability in it.

Mr Barber — They publish it and put it on exhibition.

Mr HERBERT — I will tell you what they do not do. When local governments go to elections they do not advertise all their election commitments on a website, and there is absolutely no scrutiny of those election commitments. I get on pretty well with most of the Greens, but if we are talking about promises and local government, there is an issue. I would have thought they would be more than happy to list their election commitments and be accountable to them when elected, as we are in government.

People are clearly sick to death of massive rate rises that have little accountability and are contrary to the promises made when councillors or prospective councillors go to an election. We think that is not right. We think there needs to be accountability, and we put that at the election. We put a target figure and said, 'If you want to go beyond CPI, then you have to make a case for it. You have to go the Essential Services Commission, just like power or water companies do when they try to put up their rates. There has to be some measure of accountability'. I cannot understand why anyone in this place would think that is wrong and that there should not be at least some scrutiny of and accountability for the massive rises we have had. Perhaps some do believe that, and that is okay; we are all different. But we made this election commitment as part of our core mandate, just like rebuilding our TAFEs and fixing up our schools, and before it can even be implemented those opposite want it to face a committee stacked with people who do not like the policy.

That is what this is about. The coalition does not like the policy, and that is why it has brought this motion. It is really shabby. It is contempt for an election process and absolute contempt for the Victorian people. One would have thought from the Menzies era that the Liberal Party would have had some concerns about rampant rises in local government rates impacting upon people's lives, but it seems that that is of absolutely no interest to those on the other side whatsoever.

I will not say much more. I wanted to keep my comments to those first two points. In essence, I do not think this is the way that parliamentary committees should operate. I do not think it is in the interests of this chamber or this Parliament. I do not think it is in the interest of the members of Parliament here who actually want to get an outcome, have proper referrals, do the work and research that is needed and make recommendations to the Parliament and the government. It undermines the efforts of all those people who genuinely want to make a difference to make Victoria a better place through the committee system. This motion is shabby; it is nothing more than a political witch-hunt, and it is really quite sad that we are even here debating it.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Thank you, Acting President, for the opportunity to say a few words in support of the motion moved by Mary Wooldridge and supported by what I hope will be a majority to allow this motion to be agreed to.

I have been listening to the filibuster, and now we have had several hours of debate. I cannot recall whether Mr Mulino was the first cab off the rank, but we certainly listened to in excess of 70 minutes of contributions that were absolute rubbish — filibuster and intellectually contorted arguments as to why the workings of democracy should cease, why we should hold the government's processes in awe and allow it to continue, and why we should forfeit our values and be submissive to the Labor government and its policies and initiatives. It was said, for example, that somehow the Essential Services Commission is a higher authority than the Parliament of Victoria. I am sorry, but I do not share that view.

Also I do not share the view that no chamber should exercise its democratic rights as it sees fit. If this motion to refer matters to the various committees is passed here because the majority of members of Parliament believe, then that will happen. That is the will of the people, and members here are their elected representatives. To suggest that somehow this process is undemocratic and that these committees are stacked with Liberals, when clearly we do not have a majority

in this chamber and we do not have a majority in individual committees, is absolutely intellectually dishonest. To suggest that somehow this is all a big Liberal conspiracy is ridiculous.

The process of referral of matters to parliamentary committees is a course of action that is available to this chamber. It is a process that is commonplace in parliaments, where you may have committees that work to complement, in conjunction with or parallel to, other processes that are established by government. Just because the government of the day establishes a process does not mean that it is foolproof or that it is perfect. Otherwise there would be no elections — ever — because each government would be perfect, and there would be no cause for changes of government. Unfortunately that does not happen. In a democracy, as we have come to know, governments are changed because governments do, unfortunately, stuff things up. We have seen, for example, this government reopen the Fiskville inquiry. Why did it do that? Because it felt there were shortcomings. Whether or not that proves to be the case is yet to be seen.

I am on the record as having concerns about the remit of the current Royal Commission into Family Violence, because the minister is on the record in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) as saying she has not included in the terms of reference the requirement to examine causes of domestic violence. How one can actually look at service delivery and recommendations as to how to improve our services and programs without being informed about causes is beyond my comprehension. Often when a government sets up a particular process or structure or authority, unfortunately it is complicated by other motives and agendas, and sometimes this is not necessarily in the best interests of democracy.

It is naive or dishonest to believe that a government's own processes are more important than those of the house of review of its Parliament. It is a negative reflection on the Parliament, and anyone who got up and argued to the contrary has a few lessons to learn about democratic processes. This is a house of review; referrals to committees are commonplace. This house has a remit to scrutinise government and its operations and to hold it to account. That is entirely appropriate.

In terms of the merit of these referrals, one is to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. Mr Herbert mentioned what he claimed were issues of mandate. If the Labor government had ended up getting a 12-seat, 15-seat or 20-seat majority, with 5 to 10 per cent swings, then we could actually talk about mandates, but when you are involved in winning a handful of seats on

slender margins, which may total — if you are lucky — 2000 votes in the state in an election campaign where the unions were quite coercive and deceptive, and ran — —

Ms Shing — I'm sorry; coercive and deceptive?

Mrs PEULICH — Ms Shing, you have either had your turn or you can have your turn — —

Ms Shing — Coercive and deceptive?

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, they were. Let me give one example. A former councillor from the City of Casey, whom Mr Mulino would know well, Kevin Bradford, was wearing a firefighters uniform. Kevin Bradford had never been a firefighter. The member for Narre Warren North, Luke Donnellan, on being quizzed about whether — —

Ms Shing — On a point of order, Acting President, Mrs Peulich in a point of order earlier today was at great pains to point out the need to remain relevant to the motion and the wording as it appears on the notice paper. The Acting President at the time then indicated that the questions to be focused upon in members' contributions were why should nor should not these matters be referred to the relevant committees. Mrs Peulich then, as far as my recollection goes, indicated that the point of order had been upheld and then referred to it on a number of occasions in the course of other interjections. I now find it somewhat ironic that Mrs Peulich has strayed into talking about specific issues that have nothing to do with the motion — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! Ms Shing should come to her point of order.

Ms Shing — The point of order is one of relevance in exactly the same form as raised by Mrs Peulich earlier in the day.

Mrs PEULICH — On the point of order, Acting President, clearly there is no point of order and those comments ought to be ruled out as such. I was directly responding to Ms Shing's interjection, which was on the question of mandate and the right of any Parliament to make references to a committee, so I was addressing the why and the when. Ms Shing made a farce, a circus, out of the PAEC process. She should stop doing that in this chamber.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Ms Shing, learn a few things. Pipe down and let other members of Parliament who

have been democratically elected have their say. You are ridiculing yourself.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! I thank Mrs Peulich and Ms Shing. I do not uphold Ms Shing's point of order, but I encourage Mrs Peulich to speak relevantly to the motion.

Mrs PEULICH — I was responding directly to an interjection on the question of mandate and whether there were coercive — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — I am standing on my feet, and therefore it is not unruly, Mr Dalidakis.

Mr Dalidakis — Taking up the interjection isn't unruly?

Mrs PEULICH — No. I am standing on my feet; I am speaking.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! I ask that members allow Mrs Peulich to continue without interruption.

Mrs PEULICH — I was making a point about winning a handful of seats by slender margins which probably do not even total up to 2000 votes, especially in the context where some quite coercive and deceptive practices occurred during that election campaign, where people wearing union attire pretended to be members of unions when in actual fact they never had been. The absolute proof was a former councillor, Kevin Bradford, claiming that he was a firefighter. When the Narre Warren North MP said, 'Well, he is a firefighter for today', it quite clearly showed that deception had been involved. Therefore the claim to some mandate is a nefarious one, especially when the three major points on which the government was elected were shovel-ready projects, fully funded promises and the 50 level crossings.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Ms Shing, put a sock in it! Those three matters are yet to be seen. We have not yet seen any shovel-ready projects. We understand the funding of those projects and promises, which were said to be fully funded, is dependent on the sale of the port of Melbourne. And the 50 level crossings are — —

Ms Shing interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Ms Shing, I think you have got diarrhoea. Will you give it a miss?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! I remind members that we have a member making a contribution at the moment. If that member is on her feet, I advise the other members to remain silent while she makes her contribution to the house.

Ms Shing — On a point of order, Acting President, I just seek your guidance as to whether that courtesy will also be extended to speakers who will make contributions later in this debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! That is not a point of order. I encourage Mrs Peulich to continue with her contribution.

Mrs PEULICH — Thank you, Acting President. The claim that somehow this house does not have the remit to do what it is doing, that these references were somehow politically stacked and the claim to a mandate are all fabricated, contorted, intellectual arguments to not only filibuster on this motion — possibly to prevent the house moving onto the next one — but also clearly suppress the voice of the community, where there is significant unrest in relation to many of these issues.

I missed out on hearing Mr Barber's contribution to the debate, but I imagine he probably spoke at length about the concerns about rate capping. I am on the record as supporting lower rates; there is no doubt about that. This is about whether that is best achieved through rate capping using the CPI, which is not an index that reflects the cost of doing business in local government, with the threats being, if a punitive approach is taken, that local government could be cutting infrastructure, cutting services or lifting its fees and charges. That would be and is of significant concern to many councils, which are trying to understand how the Essential Services Commission may work, and dare I say every exception to the mandated CPI cap in my view, except in extraordinary circumstances, is an F for failure for the Andrews government in terms of this policy.

These are the concerns that need to be nipped out. We do not want to have the genie let out of the bottle or the horse bolt without us. We are democratically elected representatives involved in our own communities and have the opportunity to shape the way policy may be constructed or implemented or perhaps changed or evolved in order to make it workable. I do want lower rates, but I also want it to be done in a way that is sustainable for each of those communities.

I do not intend to filibuster, but I wish to say that we are completely within our remit to make these referrals. I do not wish to engage in the direct debate of the details

of this motion. That will be done when the reports come back to the Parliament. Any committee member of Parliament who does not agree with the conclusions of a report that is to be tabled in this Parliament has the freedom to submit a minority report. That is how democracy works. I see this as a very important part of the workings of this chamber, and in this instance I commend the Greens for supporting the motion.

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I am pleased to make a contribution to this debate. I say at the outset that it has been a quite wideranging debate in which members have been able to canvass a number of issues. This wideranging motion addresses a number of issues, including several significant infrastructure projects in our state as well as issues relating to machinery of government changes, municipal rates and the government's rate-capping policy.

I do not propose to canvass each one of these issues, because a lot of them have already been canvassed at some length by other members, in particular by the government's lead speaker, Mr Mulino. I congratulate him on what was a very comprehensive contribution at the outset of this debate, in which he canvassed the government's position in relation to a number of significant infrastructure projects, particularly relating to the removal of railway level crossings.

I add how pleased I am that the Labor Party went to the last state election committed to removing 50 level crossings across our city and state and that this was done on the basis of identifying the level crossings that were experiencing the most congestion rather than the approach of the previous government which selected, for example, the Brighton level crossing for removal even though it was, if I recall correctly, no. 223 — I could be wrong, but it was in that order — on the black spot priority list. The government is looking at ways of addressing congestion as well as improving the public transport system. The removal of level crossings will enable road traffic to flow more freely as vehicles will not be stuck at boom gates, and our train system will also operate more efficiently once a number of these level crossings have been removed.

I am pleased that the Andrews Labor government's first budget allocated funding to enable these level crossings to be removed, and the delivery of the project is very closely linked to the sale or long-term lease of the port of Melbourne. This is an important project and one that the Andrews government has made significant progress on, with a number of steps having been taken already to progress the removal of the level crossings and take them to market. This will be of enormous benefit in the

short term but particularly in the longer term, once those removals are completed.

As Mr Mulino has indicated to the house, the government already has processes underway in relation to the level crossings, the port of Melbourne, the western distributor project and the Melbourne Metro rail project that mean it is not necessary for these matters to be considered by the economy and infrastructure committee of the house.

As a member, I remarked on a number of occasions in the last Parliament how the Council committee system was not being utilised effectively under the previous government. For example, the committee I happened to be a member of received very few legislative references. If I recall correctly, only one bill came before the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee, and that happened to be a bill that was not at all contentious. In relation to the Legal and Social Issues References Committee, we received a reference relating to a federally regulated body, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority, which in no way caused the then minister and the government of the day any particular exposure. The parliamentary committees were not being utilised for their intended purposes.

In relation to these references, the reference to the economy and infrastructure committee really relates to matters that, as I have indicated, are already being appropriately canvassed through other processes of government. No justification has yet been given as to why the committee would need to examine these projects on a six-monthly basis, other than one of grandstanding by the opposition, because it is very clear that it is not committed to these groundbreaking projects that will transform our city and our state.

We know the previous government signed up to a disastrous east-west link tunnel project, and it was prepared to expose the state to potentially enormous damages through signing an agreement on the eve of the last election. The thing that was even more shocking about this was the side letter that was signed by the then Treasurer, the member for Malvern in the Assembly, potentially exposing the state to considerable financial damages, essentially as a punishment for the community having the gall to change governments. It is a great relief that we have such a talented Treasurer in Tim Pallas, who has managed to negotiate a very good outcome for Victoria in terms of that side letter, the implications of that side letter and the implications of that east-west link contract and has ensured that the Andrews government has incurred costs of just \$1.

Ms Fitzherbert — That's not true.

Ms MIKAKOS — Ms Fitzherbert, the payments that were made to the consortium were drawn down before the election, during the time of the previous government. Of course members of the opposition now wish to rewrite history and ignore facts inconvenient to them, because we know the east–west link project would have been a disaster for Victoria. The previous government was prepared to lie to the Victorian people about the business case. What has come to light since then is the reality that this project did not stack up in terms of the business case, and it would have been an absolute disaster for our state.

That is why it is inexplicable that the Prime Minister continues to campaign on this issue of the east–west link, basically defying the wishes of the Victorian people. He conceded late last year that the state election would be a referendum on the east–west link. It was, and the Victorian people made their position crystal clear. It is time the Prime Minister abided by the wishes of the people of this state, who have made it clear that they do not want the dud east–west tunnel. Rather, they want an improved public transport system.

We are putting our energies into removing these level crossings and constructing the Melbourne Metro rail project and making other improvements to our public transport system, because that is what is going to be of benefit to our state. It is about time the Prime Minister realised he needs to make a financial contribution from the funds Victorians pay every day through the taxation system, both income tax and the GST. We have an expectation that we will receive an appropriate share of federal infrastructure funding and that we will receive a significant contribution at least of the magnitude that the federal government was prepared to commit to the failed tunnel project.

Another aspect of the motion relates to the issue of rate capping. I will speak briefly on this issue. The Andrews government handed down a budget that was very much focused on the needs of Victorian families. We also made a number of commitments during the election campaign to assist families with cost-of-living pressures. One of those commitments was to cap municipal rate rises to the CPI, beginning in 2016–17.

It is rather odd that this motion seeks to have a parliamentary committee begin a six-month inquiry into a rate-capping policy that has not yet commenced. The motion does not seek to look at this in terms of the impact of rate capping in 2016–17. The inquiry is to commence immediately even though the rate-capping policy has not yet come into effect. It has been

interesting to hear the position taken by opposition members on this issue. They are trying to be too clever by half. They do not want to come out and say they are opposed to rate capping, but they like to ask questions that consistently suggest they are opposed to rate capping. If they think it is appropriate for ratepayers to fund the policies of local councils, such as paying a CEO a salary of \$420 000 per annum or engaging in policies without giving appropriate justification to the ratepayers who paid for them, they should come out and say so. If this motion gets up and this process begins, the views of coalition members on this issue are going to be well exposed.

We would expect the Greens party to oppose a policy on rate capping. It does not surprise me at all, because we know the Greens party never clearly articulates how its policies will be costed and paid for, whether it is at the council, state or federal level. We are a party that puts forward the cost of our policies. We subject ourselves to the scrutiny of the Victorian people, and we have always been transparent in that way. It is surprising that the coalition would join the Greens to oppose a policy that is essentially one of political accountability and transparency in relation to individuals standing for public office at the local government level. It is particularly surprising that the coalition is supportive of policies that would essentially continue to put pressure on the ability of families to pay their rates.

I am very aware of a lot of people in my electorate who struggle to make ends meet — senior citizens on age pensions as well as families who are on concession cards. They struggle to pay their bills, and that includes municipal rates. That is why we have responded to those cost-of-living pressures by moving to cap municipal rates. This is a responsible policy which we took to the election. The coalition needs to carefully rethink its position on this, because we will be reminding the Victorian people of the coalition's views on rate capping every time residents receive their rate notices. Coalition members need to come clean about their position. They cannot continue to say one thing and suggest another. If they are in fact opposed to this particular issue, as it appears so far, then they need to come clean.

In respect of the last part of the motion, which relates to machinery of government changes, it is rather surprising that the committee is being asked to report on machinery of government changes that have been in effect for a relatively short time. The machinery of government changes, which of course happen regularly when there is a change of government, took effect on 1 January. The key change was the reduction in the

number of departments from nine to seven. In my portfolio area we have established the Department of Health and Human Services, which brings together teams from departments across government that cover health, human services, sport and recreation, and medical research functions.

We know there are individuals who face particular problems, whether it be mental health issues or contact with the child protection system or having a disability. Being able to take a holistic view across the Health and Human Services portfolio will provide a greater integration of service delivery for those individuals. It is signalling new ways of developing social policy and delivering services that are focused on improving the wellbeing of all Victorians.

Of course many Victorians will come into contact with health and social services at some point in their lives. It is important that we have a health system that provides universal health care for all whilst also having social services that provide targeted assistance to disadvantaged or vulnerable Victorians. This could include children who are at risk of abuse or people who are homeless. The bringing together of these departments means we are able to build a more cohesive and supportive community to offer opportunities to disadvantaged or vulnerable Victorians.

This merger will drive a change in outcomes for Victorians, particularly those with multiple and complex needs that span a range of issues, whether they be mental health issues, housing, drugs and alcohol, chronic health conditions or disability. The new department recognises the connections between wellbeing, vulnerability and social inclusion, and will build stronger, functional policy and service delivery connections. The new department will ensure that its governance, structure, performance monitoring and service delivery arrangements continue to ensure the provision of high-quality services.

The previous government also made machinery of government changes. I make the point that in respect of our machinery of government changes there have been no public sector jobs lost. We are determined to ensure that we provide better services to the Victorian community, and that means ensuring that we have departments that are appropriately staffed. That is why I am pleased we saw a significant boost in my portfolio area in the recent state budget, with recruitment of more than 110 new child protection workers to assist in that service delivery and to ensure that we can provide a child protection system that is focused on keeping children safe and on supporting vulnerable families.

By contrast, the previous government made a number of machinery of government changes in late 2010 and early 2011. It reconfigured the Department of Planning and Community Development so that Regional Development Victoria moved from the former Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development (DIIRD); the integrated transport planning and development function moved to the Department of Transport; and many human services functions moved to the Department of Human Services. DIIRD was renamed the Department of Business and Innovation (DBI), and a number of other changes were made as well.

In 2013 the previous government renamed DBI the Department of State Development, Business and Innovation and moved the red tape commissioner and energy resources functions into this department. It created the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, which brought together the transport, planning, local government and sport and recreation functions into the one department. It also created the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, which brought together the land management and primary industries functions, and moved Aboriginal affairs and veterans affairs into the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

We have seen a number of machinery of government changes in previous governments. I do not recall the previous government indicating any willingness to take its machinery of government changes off to a parliamentary committee, nor do I recall it having any great focus on explaining those changes to the house or to the Parliament. By contrast, I am very happy to explain the rationale behind the merging of the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services in the context of the changes we are making that are focused around our better servicing vulnerable children and families.

Another point I make is that while we have made our changes without public sector jobs being lost, the previous government made a lot of changes to departments in restructuring them and used that as the basis for sacking thousands of public servants. This had a huge impact on the human services portfolio. Ms Crozier was at a briefing earlier today when the implications of that were explained to her by the Auditor-General's office in relation to the child protection system. It is important that members are aware that different governments have made machinery of government changes from time to time. We have been very transparent with ours, explaining what they are and the implications for the community. I contrast that with the approach the previous government took on

the pretext of sacking thousands of public servants during the last term of government. That had a significant impact on the delivery of services across Victoria.

With those words, I make the point that there has not been a coherent argument put to the house as to why these references should be sent to the various parliamentary committees. We are supportive of a parliamentary committee system that adds to the work of the Parliament and adds to transparency in government. We have been transparent in the processes we have established in relation to each of the issues canvassed by this motion, and therefore these references are not necessary because that work is already occurring.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak against this motion for a number of reasons. The first is that this motion reeks of hypocrisy. The second is that this motion is flawed, and the third is the ramifications of this motion being passed. There would be serious ramifications for the abuse of the upper house committees should this motion succeed. And we should not be surprised at the hypocrisy of those opposite, because in the last term of Parliament, when these upper house committees were established, the government of the day used the 21-19 rule — that is, it was in the majority with 21 members, with the non-government parties in this house having a collective total of 19 members. That meant that if any non-government MP brought in a motion similar to the one before us, which suggested that a certain issue or issues be investigated by an upper house committee, the government used its majority to vote against every motion.

One might have got up; I apologise if one did. I am not sure if a bill was sent to one of the upper house committees.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr LEANE — I am happy to stand corrected. Mr Barber's bill on car dooring was referred to a committee. I appreciate his correcting me. I think there was one other reference that made it to an upper house committee, but that was the extent to which the government, with a majority in this house, accepted any discussion or any reference to an upper house committee.

The government made sure that it loaded up the upper house committees with references which did not mean a lot to the people of Victoria. Most of them did not mean much at all. They were references that kept the

upper house committees busy. The house would collapse on a Wednesday evening so a committee could meet.

What would usually happen was that of three upper house committees, only one would have a reference. It seemed to be that the committees would take a turn in having a reference, meaning the members of the committee with a reference would stay here after the house would adjourn and look into that reference — one which would mean not much at all to the people of Victoria — while the members of the other two committees would knock off, and all the ministers would knock off and get on with other — —

Ms Crozier — Ours was a good committee.

Mr LEANE — Ms Crozier says, 'Ours was a good committee'. Ours was probably a good committee because there was some good socialising, and people got along. I said at the time that I was a bit nervous — —

Ms Crozier — We had excellent references.

Mr LEANE — I do not know if it had excellent references. I am happy to disagree with Ms Crozier on that.

Ms Crozier interjected.

Mr LEANE — I was not on your committee at that time, but towards the end of the term — —

Ms Crozier — The functions of pharmacies reference.

Mr LEANE — I think it was debatable whether or not the functions of pharmacies reference was such a good one or not. I also wonder why the other two committees could not have been sitting at the same time and looking at other important references. It was never, however, about actually examining issues that would be important to the people of Victoria. It was about keeping one committee busy while the house collapsed on a Wednesday evening. That was what it was all about.

Now, all of a sudden, coalition members have a new enthusiasm for these committees and what they should do to the point that they want these committees to have running references requiring the committees to report every six months on everything. Coalition members want to examine everything now, when in the last term the desire of the coalition in government was for these committees to look into nothing. Coalition members have gone from being keen to use these committees to

look into nothing to wanting a rolling committee inquiry that looks into everything.

That brings me to Ms Wooldridge's motion and some of the flaws in it. The motion refers to the removal of level crossings; I will come back to that one. Let us talk about paragraph (1)(b), which refers to the western distributor. The western distributor has not been confirmed as a project, and it might not be confirmed as a project. As the Special Minister of State explained today, the project has gone to another level of independent investigation as to whether or not it is a project the government should embrace and believe will be good and beneficial for the metropolitan area. We have gone to another process, and it might result in the answer being no. This motion calls for a committee to inquire into, consider and report every six months on a project that may not even come into existence. That is a glaring flaw in this motion.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr LEANE — We will wait and see, Mr Barber, whether it is accepted or not. Mr Barber might be happy to make presumptions about this, but the government is not. We are going through a process, and we are committed to it.

Paragraph (1)(c) of the motion, regarding the Melbourne Metro rail project, I will come back to. I turn now to subparagraph (d), in relation to the sale and lease of the port. Here is another item where there is a political process to be gone through. I understand that in the other chamber the Treasurer introduced legislation and first read a bill to enable that in recent days. There is a big process to go through. In this debate Mr Finn was banging the desk as he talked about the government making a mockery of a political process, while an attempt to make a mockery of a political process — one that has not even started — has been glaringly inserted into this motion. There are no guarantees in this process. There are no guarantees that the legislation will go through this house, and we respect that. We accept that there is some work to be done in order for that to happen and that it is not guaranteed. We accept that, because we respect the political process. The bill has been brought to this house because we respect the political process. Paragraph (1)(d) is flawed.

In paragraph (1)(e), relating to the rail link to Melbourne Airport, the motion calls for an update on a project that the coalition government announced it would build without there having been any substance to its announcement. All government members ever did was go out and say they would build that rail link. So

every six months this committee is supposed to report on something that a previous government's members merely said they would build, even though they did not mean it at all.

Ms Mikakos — They just ran ads.

Mr LEANE — Exactly. Ms Mikakos said, 'They just ran ads'. They did worse than that. They were actually standing on stations handing out fake tickets, paid for by the taxpayer, which said, 'Catch the next train to the airport'. Victorians were not fooled. When we talk about the \$15 million that the Napthine government spent on advertising that agenda, which included the airport rail link, something the government was never serious about, we should remember that it has recently been reported that Victorians paid no attention to those ads and that they meant nothing to people watching them on their television or listening to them on the radio. Victorians knew the Napthine government was not fair dinkum. It was fair enough for people to have got to that point after four years of appalling inaction and of the Napthine government breaking promises its members made during the 2010 election campaign.

During the election campaign in 2010, Ms Wooldridge, the current Leader of the Opposition and mover of this motion, went out to Doncaster with Ted Baillieu, the then member for Hawthorn and Leader of the Opposition. They said they were going to build a rail line to Doncaster. They were going to get the money, do a feasibility study and build it.

I have the documentation in my office, and I cherish it. I cherish the documentation Ms Wooldridge put out to the electorate in 2010 as an amazing relic of the time when Ted Baillieu and Mary Wooldridge went out to the people of Doncaster and said they were going to build a rail line to Doncaster, which was just not true. It was exactly the same when those same people came out and said they were going to build a rail link to Melbourne Airport. There was no substance, no work done on it, no research. They just said they were going to build it. People had already fallen for that one and they were not going to fall for it again. They proved that at the ballot box.

To do a six-monthly report on something that the coalition government promised but never intended to do is ridiculous, and it is embarrassing that it is included in this motion. That is why I wonder whether members of the opposition are even fair dinkum about this motion. If they were fair dinkum, they would not have put a couple of these line items into the motion.

Paragraph 1(a) of the motion refers to ‘projects relating to the removal of railway level crossings’. A committee looking into that issue is not going to make any difference to the agenda this government has set. We have committed to removing 50 level crossings over the next two terms of government, and I know that it kills the opposition to know that there have already been contracts awarded for four of those crossings. Expressions of interest have already been received to upgrade nine level crossings on the Dandenong line, which means they will move ahead.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LEANE — It was transparent, and there is more good news around the corner. I am more than happy to engage in this debate and respond to Mr Finn. Mr Finn intimated that the funding for the level crossing removal at Main Road, St Albans, has been reallocated by this government. He posed that question, and I can tell him that the answer is that the funding for Main Road, St Albans, is still there. If Mr Finn waits for what will only be a matter of weeks, he will be pleasantly surprised at what we announce about Main Road, St Albans. I will go to the extent of saying that I am sure that wild horses will not keep Mr Finn away from the photo opportunities when that project is finished in coming years. He will be there. There will be photos, and he will polish up his hair and make sure he is ready to go. Trust me, he will be there.

It is only good news for Mr Finn, who says he has advocated for the project. Advocating is good, and that is what we do here, but actually delivering results is the most important part. Advocating is very good, but delivering is a lot better than good. Delivering is the most important part, so I am quite excited about this government’s level crossing removal program. There is one in Mr Dalidakis’s region, and I know he is very interested in —

Mr Dalidakis — Four.

Mr LEANE — I know there are four in the electorate he represents. We like to spoil Mr Dalidakis. There is one in Burke Road that we had a conversation about recently and which Mr Dalidakis knows a lot about. He has family members who engage in activities right near that intersection, and they know it very well. We are looking forward to Mr Dalidakis, on behalf of the government, making sure that project goes as smoothly as possible. I know he will do a great job in advocating for the people in that area and in assisting Mr Staikos, the member for Bentleigh in the Assembly, on taking an interest in the crossings at North Road, Centre Road and McKinnon Road for which the

contracts were, as we know, signed a couple of weeks ago.

The good news for the whole chamber, and I am sure members are all excited, is that there is going to be lots of activity. I do not think the economy and infrastructure committee will need to sit and talk about these projects, because they will see them as they drive past them. They will be seeing them in real time. The level of activity will be enormous, and we accept that. We accept that we have set a huge agenda, and we accept that there will sometimes be criticism as the projects are rolled out. However, it is better to be criticised when you are in the process of doing something than be criticised for doing nothing, which is what happened to the former government.

We are excited about that project. We are looking forward to it. We are also looking forward to the Melbourne Metro project. There is a lot of activity around there. People on the other side can be cynical about the Melbourne Metro project, but it will start this term. It is going to be fantastic.

Major projects cannot be just a quick fix. In the last term the previous government ran a competition for a redesign of the Flinders Street railway station. The competition was initiated by the then Minister for Major Projects, now the member for Croydon in the Assembly. The design competition was won by an overseas architectural company. That company took the money — good luck to it, it won and it deserved the money — and then nothing happened. I thank the former government for that competition. I hope I do not hurt the feelings of coalition members, but I like the look of Flinders Street station. I like the fact that the current government is prepared to put money into restoring Flinders Street station to its former glory.

This motion represents what is going to be a regular fishing trip for the opposition. The opposition wants the committees of the Parliament to do its shadow portfolio work for it. The opposition will aim to get reports on the main pillars of the new government’s agenda in the hope it will find problems it can highlight and then run around saying that the sky is falling and it is all terrible out there. The opposition will be on a constant fishing trip over this term, and it expects our parliamentary committees to facilitate that fishing trip.

This motion represents an abuse of the Parliament by the opposition. It is rank hypocrisy when you consider the way committees were abused by the previous government. We should not be surprised. Members need to see this motion for what it is: it is hypocritical,

it is flawed and it is a dangerous abuse of the Parliament's time.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 21

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

Noes, 16

Bourman, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Mikakos, Ms
Carling-Jenkins, Dr	Mulino, Mr
Dalidakis, Mr	Patten, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Pulford, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Shing, Ms
Herbert, Mr	Symes, Ms
Jennings, Mr	Tierney, Ms
Leane, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Young, Mr

Pairs

Davis, Mr	Melhem, Mr
-----------	------------

Motion agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Reference

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That pursuant to sessional order 6 this house requires the economy and infrastructure committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 24 November 2015, on options for a Victorian renewable energy target that is not invalidated or limited by section 7C of the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000 (Cth) and that creates renewable energy additional to the federal renewable energy target.

Just the other day the Labor and Liberal parties at the federal level got together to tear apart the federal renewable energy target. Some 41 000 gigawatt hours of green power that was to be created under that target is now to be reduced down to the low 30s, and the direct result of that decision by the Labor and Liberal parties is many more millions of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in our atmosphere. That is a matter for the federal parties, but down here in Victoria the Labor Party purports to have an interest in a Victorian renewable energy target. In fact at the same time as it was doing that dirty, polluting deed with Tony Abbott, it was launching some sort of hokey online campaign that lasted about 5 minutes, asking people to join Labor

in lobbying Tony Abbott for a Victorian renewable energy target. It is that fraudulent piece of political spin that needs to be addressed, and it is for that reason that the Greens are calling for this inquiry.

The government's excuse down here in Victoria is that section 7C of the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000 — the commonwealth act — prevents it from having a light target here in Victoria. I have not got the time to go into the constitutional niceties of that. I am not even, for today's purposes, arguing about that. I am simply saying that if the Victorian government is committed to adding extra renewables into the grid — having just stripped them out of the federal target, and the legislation hit the federal Parliament today — then it ought to have a look at all the other options that would not in any way, under any stretch of the imagination, compete with the federal provisions.

The Greens-Labor government of the ACT has already worked out a way to do it. It is requiring that a certain amount of its electricity supply is to come from renewable sources. It ran an auction to obtain that power, and who is the beneficiary of that renewable energy target in the ACT? The Ararat Wind Farm is now going to get the nod. In Mr Ramsay's electorate, in the Ararat area, there will be more jobs. Believe it or not, the state Minister for Energy and Resources put out a press release congratulating that wind farm on getting the green light, which it got only because the ACT Greens-Labor government decided to get off its backside and introduce its own renewable energy target.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmar) — Order!

Mr BARBER — Mr Ramsay is champing at the bit, Acting President, to discuss the subject of the renewable energy target, although I have a funny feeling that Mr Drum is in line first — I do not know if it is due to seniority or some negotiation.

Amazingly enough, the Andrews Labor government went to the election with no position and no plan on renewable energy. Its position was that, if elected, it would develop a plan for renewable energy — a classic example of, 'Trust me now, and I will tell you what my promise is after you have elected me', which seems to be some sort of postmodern method of governing. The government got away with doing a bit of a soft-shoe shuffle — a look over there and 'Isn't that interesting?' — but its promise added up to nothing. Along the way, and even recently, the government has

mouthed the right words about a Victorian renewable energy target, but it will not come good.

Not to pre-empt the outcome of any inquiry, but there are a half-a-dozen ways that a Victorian government could immediately boost the amount of renewables produced and used in Victoria. The government itself could start purchasing a higher proportion of its electricity from green sources. It could put a requirement on generator licences. It could put a requirement on retail licences under the Electricity Industry Act 2000. It could use funds it currently collects and pays over to subsidise a couple of aluminium smelters to subsidise the construction of more green power in the grid. It could certainly get out of the road of those who are trying to do it themselves, and it could stop power companies from blocking renewable development at the household farm or business level. That would be for the inquiry itself to consider.

Unfortunately we have also seen a move to burn native forests in furnaces to produce electricity and label it green. The deal the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, has put into the federal Parliament today, now that he has had the green light from the federal Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, is certainly going to provide for that. What could be less green than taking Victorian forests — which are some of the most carbon-dense ecosystems on earth, that are ready to grow older and older into their old growth state, absorbing carbon all the while — and actually burning them? It is pure desperation on behalf of VicForests, which is trying to create a reason for its existence now that it cannot sell its product anymore.

It is an absolutely shocking irony that Japanese woodchip companies now have a much stronger environmental consciousness than the Labor and Liberal parties in the Australian Parliament. They are turning up their noses at Australian woodchips and growing their own in plantations, so what is left for VicForests to do but try to find someone who will burn up forests and put emissions into the atmosphere to sell electricity. In fact under the deal that Bill Shorten has just facilitated, it could be that all the increase in renewables from here on in falls into this category of burning up forests, which should in fact be developed into carbon banks.

The Victorian Labor government is flip-flopping all over the joint when it should be lobbying Bill Shorten to refuse the deal, to reject burning woodchips from native forests and to start talking about setting a post-2020 target for renewables. Even if it fails in all that, it has the power in its hands within Victorian

legislation to start boosting renewables. It is for that reason that we have asked the Labor government, if it is sincere, to support this reference so that some of these issues which have been bounced around in the political sphere can be addressed with the engagement of the renewable energy sector and farmers, householders and businesses — all those who will benefit when they become electricity producers.

We need to get all that information out on the table and deal with it in a parliamentary committee process which, despite what members might have heard here today, is often much less political than the debates we have in this chamber. In committees the facts, the evidence and the experts have to be tested, and politicians have to sit and listen while the community talks. Why is it that Labor wants to keep shuffling around on this issue when it has the chance to have a parliamentary inquiry into it?

We know the coalition is unrelentingly hostile to renewable energy. It has all but destroyed the industry for large-scale renewables in Australia, firstly, just by campaigning relentlessly in public and, secondly, by setting up a review by a notorious climate change denier with a clearly predetermined outcome. By the way, though, even that inquiry had to acknowledge that the effect of keeping the renewable energy target would be that power prices would in fact fall in the future, because we would avoid having to use very expensive gas to meet our future energy needs, but nonetheless, it was a predetermined outcome designed to get rid of the target, and now there is this macabre dance between Labor and Liberal in Canberra until finally Labor caves and slashes the target. I am not confident that the coalition is willing to support the sorts of measures that the community is crying out for.

We know the vast majority of people want development in renewable energy ahead of any new coal or fossil fuels, but they just seem to find themselves on the wrong side of the debate every time, and opposition members should be willing to support an inquiry into the issue, unless their minds are completely and utterly closed for all time. We have just voted to support a reference motion that the opposition moved for some of these committees to look at a whole range of important public projects in the area of infrastructure. On the same rationale, why would it not be willing to support an inquiry? Why would it be scared of an inquiry into renewable energy when energy is so clearly an important part of our public infrastructure?

I thank the chamber for the time that has been made available to debate this motion. I look forward to hearing the contributions of other members.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to take this opportunity to rise and make a contribution to the debate on the motion moved by Mr Barber in which he asks that the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure inquire into, consider and report no later than 24 November 2015 on the options for a renewable energy target for Victoria that is not invalidated or intimidated by section 7C of the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000, and that creates renewable energy additional to the federal renewable energy target.

That is the motion moved by Mr Barber, and I think he has read the mind of the coalition in that it will be opposing this motion. That has little to do with politics and everything to do with harm minimisation by The Nationals and the desire of the coalition for us to have a national scheme.

Mr Barber said that — I cannot quite remember his language — we are hostile opponents to renewable energy, but during the last four years we have a couple of years led by former Premier Baillieu and then a couple of years led by former Premier Napthine, the member for South-West Coast in the Assembly, who openly came out and said that he loves wind turbines and loves the concept of renewable energy. When we have had a Premier who has openly shown his affection for an industry, knowing how important that industry is to his electorate, saying openly that he was pro-wind farms, it is difficult to see the reasoning behind the comment that somehow or the other the coalition is hostile towards this issue.

The real problem that coalition members have is that agreeing to an inquiry effectively means that we see some merit in Victoria having its own renewable energy target. Quite simply, we do not. In 2009 the Labor government in this state ceded this state's powers in a Victorian renewable energy target to the federal government so that we could work towards establishing a harmonised national scheme. That work has been ongoing through the Labor Party and also the coalition in Canberra.

We understand that this issue is primarily and largely about electricity prices or energy costs. During our term in government we more than anybody understood the cost-of-living pressures on mums and dads. We understood that many Victorian families were having an extremely difficult time finding a way to deal with those pressures. The work that the former Minister for

Water, Peter Walsh, the member for Murray Plains in the Assembly, did in lowering water prices had a big influence on cost-of-living pressures. Keeping our electricity prices as low as we possibly can has a big impact on those pressures.

There are only some things state governments can do. They are very limited in how they can influence cost-of-living pressures. The state government has an opportunity to influence some of the utility accounts that come to mums and dads, to everyday Victorians. We consider it to be our responsibility to do the absolute utmost we can to keep cost-of-living pressures down. Our opinion, which I know is different from Mr Barber's, is that if Victoria went out on its own and set up its own plan separate from a national plan or from those in other states, it would create a ridiculous situation. There would be a different pricing structure in one state from those in others.

Many of our communities, specifically those in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales, are effectively one community divided by the Murray River. We would have Albury and Wodonga on different pricing structures, and there would be different pricing structures in all the Murray River communities. There would also be different commercial arrangements for people who wanted to invest in the renewable energy industry. A deal that would work one way in Wodonga would work a different way in Albury, as would a deal work one way in Mulwala and a different way in Yarrawonga, one way in Echuca and a different way in Moama and so on with all the river communities. Those communities see themselves as one.

In our time in this Parliament we need to be doing much more to harmonise current cross-border anomalies. When we talk to people in our electorates, they just shake their heads in bewilderment when they hear that we continue to make our own laws which fly in the face of federal schemes or those in other states. This is another example of that. The Greens are in effect asking us to introduce a separate scheme that would influence the cost of electricity and the commercial arrangement that would exist within the renewable energy industry within each state, with different arrangements in Victoria from those over the Murray River or over the border with South Australia. It is the yearning for harmonisation and the desire to have a national scheme that form the cornerstone of our decision to oppose this motion.

We understand that for many years we have been the beneficiaries of cheap power or energy due to our extremely rich reserves of brown coal. We understand

also that they do in fact burn dirty and that we have to do much more than we have done historically to clean up our brown coal emissions. If we are given the opportunity of returning to government, we will do what we can to transform our brown coal reserves into black coal that would burn considerably cleaner than the black coal reserves that are bringing so much wealth to New South Wales and Queensland at the minute. We in this state should not overlook that.

I know that the Greens do not want to know anything about clean coal technology. That is their prerogative. The Greens also do not really want to know about gas, even though it would have a significant impact on our coal emissions. Again, that is their prerogative. It is a free world, a free country, and they have every right to have their own opinion. However, members of the coalition have a different view. As I said, that is based on a deep desire to look after the cost-of-living pressures on everyday families and to have a harmonised national scheme. We want to make sure that we do not end up with a state scheme and a national scheme that will lead to considerable duplication, that we do not have a huge increase in red tape in the regulatory guidelines around what is likely to be put in place and that there is not an added cost on Victorian taxpayers and a truckload of confusion about how the two systems would operate in parallel.

Coalition members have looked at this very carefully. It is worth noting also that we understand there has in fact been a downturn in the demand for energy. There has been a reduction in the amount of energy being used due to the downturn in manufacturing. Some of the heavy energy-using industries are no longer doing the amount of work they were doing. There are energy efficiency technologies that are saving considerable amounts of energy as well. Those two main factors are leading to a decrease in the demand for electricity in this state. The quid pro quo in that situation is that we have an oversupply of electricity in Victoria at the minute.

I understand where Mr Barber is coming from and the whole raft of political undertones in his contribution to this debate. However, the truth of the coalition stance on this has more to do with the very basics of trying to look after everyday Victorian taxpayers — that is, mums and dads who have cost-of-living pressures, including electricity costs. We want to make sure that we have a harmonised national scheme, as opposed to having a range of different schemes that would involve duplication and create confusion about how they would work. Hopefully the coalition has made it very clear that the federal government, which has had these powers ceded to it, is currently trying to organise a

scheme. The amount of renewable energy has been set. However, the federal government is still trying to get its renewable energy target through the Parliament in a manner that will let it come to the fore.

The coalition will not be supporting this motion. We believe that a nationalised scheme is the way to go. These powers have already been given to the federal government once, and we believe they should stay with the federal government in the interests of developing a national scheme that can be understood by all Australians. This way people wishing to invest in the scheme will have a clear picture of what is available, what the return is likely to be, current demand and likely trends of demand in the future. It establishes an opportunity for people to invest in this industry should they wish to do so. It also gives Victorians a certain amount of comfort and security in the direction of energy costs for their households and their industries. Unfortunately for the Greens, the coalition will not be supporting this motion. We hope the federal government's scheme is up and running as soon as possible.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on Mr Barber's motion relating to options for a Victorian renewable energy target (VRET). It is important that we have these conversations, both in the Parliament and in the community. Many Australians are concerned about the environment. I am conscious that the choices I make and the way I live my life have consequences for the world around me and for the world I will leave to my children. I think I represent the average Victorian in that I am a diligent recycler and I use reusable shopping bags. I have a water tank, and I am building a new house that is going to have solar panels. I attempt to teach my children to be aware of environmental and sustainability issues. It is made that bit easier when there is positive messaging presented in child-friendly ways. For example, there is a *Peppa Pig* episode called 'Recycling'. It follows George and Peppa — I see Mr Morris is familiar with it.

Mr Morris — Very familiar.

Ms SYMES — I have got the jingle in my head; it has been in my head all day.

Mr Morris — I like George better than Peppa.

Ms SYMES — We have this debate in my household as well. This episode is quite good because it follows George and Peppa learning to recycle bottles and newspapers, and they visit Miss Rabbit's recycling plant. I encourage anyone who has not seen it to watch it on YouTube; it is only 4 minutes long.

My family are Zoos Victoria members. It is fantastic that Melbourne Zoo is certified by Low Carbon Australia Limited. It is the first zoo in the world to achieve carbon neutral certification and is on a journey to become an international leader in sustainability. Zooperman is the Zoos Victoria superhero and, along with his 20 Extinction Fighters, he strives to make a difference to wildlife and to fight extinction. There is also the ZooperMarket at the Melbourne Zoo orangutan enclosure — I imagine Mr Morris is familiar with that as well — where kids can learn about the many products on our supermarket shelves that contain unsustainable palm oil, the harvesting of which is destroying the native habitat of the orangutan. I think it is great that in our homes and in our leisure time we are reminded of small things we can do in our everyday lives to lessen our negative impact on our environment. I also think it is important that we talk as a Parliament about these issues on behalf of our communities. For that reason, I welcome the motion today.

Climate change is one of the most critical issues facing Victoria, and we believe that it is a responsibility of the state government to help mitigate the risks and adopt adaptation strategies to respond to the threat. It was a Labor government that first introduced Victoria's renewable energy target in 2006. The scheme unleashed billions of dollars of investment in Victoria and made us a national leader in renewable energy. Under Labor, Victoria was also the first state to have a mandatory energy efficiency target and a 5-star standard for new homes. Labor governments have a strong and proud record of bringing greenhouse emissions down. In fact Victoria used to be a national leader in renewable energy, but this title was relinquished under state and federal coalition governments.

The former state Liberal-Nationals government effectively walked away from the environment and the thousands of jobs that could and should have been created over the past four years, particularly in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. Environment Victoria CEO Mark Wakeham said that under the previous government we had:

... seen nothing but a series of attacks on Victoria's renewable energy industry, with investments in wind and solar being discouraged, and energy efficiency programs scrapped.

A report by the Climate Council released last year found that:

Victoria and NSW have moved from leaders to laggards in Australia's renewable energy race.

That report found that under the previous government the state missed out on \$4 billion in investment and 3000 jobs. It is mind-boggling to think that the former government would walk away from such an investment at the time of a jobs crisis in this state. The election of the Andrews Labor government has seen a return to a much-needed focus on tackling climate change and preserving our environment, while at the same time boosting job opportunities.

We have restarted the wind farm industry by removing the worst parts of the Baillieu and Napthine governments' anti-wind laws. We have supported thousands of jobs by reducing the dwelling buffer zone for wind projects from 2 kilometres to 1 kilometre, opening the door to community wind farms in the Macedon Ranges. This Labor government has done more to boost employment in this area in six months than the former government did in four years. These are the actions of a government that wants to be a leader on these issues, to protect the environment and to create new industries and new jobs. The commitment to a new VRET and a renewable energy action plan will build on this leadership.

Renewable energy is energy obtained from natural resources that can be constantly replenished. I find that in this space we throw around acronyms and it can sound quite complex; we could try harder to speak about sustainability and renewable energy in simple terms. Giving examples of technologies that use or enable the use of renewable energy sources is, I think, more tangible and easier for people to understand. These include wind energy, solar energy, hydropower and ocean power, and there are several more.

A renewable energy target is known as a RET. I do not think this concept is well understood by many people, and we should do more to explain it. The scheme is designed to ensure that a certain amount of Australia's electricity is sourced from renewable sources. The RET ultimately aims to introduce cleaner and more diverse sources of electricity and to support growth and employment in the renewable energy sector.

Victoria agreed to remove its renewables target in 2009 as part of a deal for a 41 000 gigawatt-hour national target. Section 7C of part 1 was included in the commonwealth Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000 as part of the national RET rollout. Section 7C gives immunity from state laws and provides that a constitutional corporation need not comply with any law of a state that substantially corresponds to this act. In effect, the commonwealth act prevents state governments from having their own schemes similar to the renewable energy target.

The Labor government is deeply disappointed with the Abbott federal government's announcement that the RET will be scaled back to 33 000 gigawatt hours by 2020. The scaling back of the RET will reduce the number of major renewable energy projects built in Victoria, costing us jobs and growth. In my electorate of Northern Victoria Region there are thousands of people, particularly young people, who are looking for work. There are plenty of job opportunities in new industries if we support the environment and renewable options, the new renewable energy employment sources.

It is our view that the federal government should either deliver on the deal it signed up to or remove the restrictions on state-based schemes. The RET scheme has worked. It is a proven, effective model for driving renewable energy investment. Further, we already have the legal architecture in place to recommence the VRET. Let us not reinvent the wheel. Let us implement a scheme with demonstrated results for Victoria.

A single national RET is the most efficient policy for supporting large-scale renewables. A state top-up RET is the best policy, because it can be integrated easily into a national RET when it is expanded again in the future. This is what happened in 2009. Other policy options will not be able to be combined into a national RET, so a VRET should be the preferred policy. This motion that proposes a reference to the economy and infrastructure committee in an effort to avoid 7C may in fact hamper our ability to advocate for the removal of 7C. It may in fact provide excuses and escape hatches for the Abbott government.

The VRET is only one part of the Labor government's renewable energy plan. We are acting to change our energy mix through a jobs-focused agenda. We have saved the Victorian energy efficiency target scheme, an energy saving scheme which cuts bills and supports 2000 jobs. The \$20 million New Energy Jobs Fund has been established to encourage investment in the renewables sector and focus on the development of technology for the generation and storage of clean energy.

We have also started work developing a renewable energy action plan. This plan will outline a comprehensive set of measures to drive investment in renewable energy in this state. A consultation paper on the renewable energy action plan will be released in the coming months. Through the consultation process the Victorian community will be invited to provide its own views and ideas on driving renewable energy in Victoria. Therefore, an additional parliamentary inquiry could potentially unnecessarily duplicate this

consultation process. However, I encourage all interested members to provide a submission to the Andrews government, and perhaps Mr Barber might like to forward his speech from *Hansard*. We encourage others to participate in the consultation on the renewable energy action plan.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — It gives me pleasure to speak to Mr Barber's motion this afternoon. Like my parliamentary colleague Damian Drum, a member for Northern Victoria Region, I do not support this motion that requires the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 24 November 2015, on options for a Victorian renewable energy target.

I concur with Mr Drum's contribution. We already have a federal renewable energy target, and despite what the previous speaker said in relation to requirements, in fact when the federal renewable target was put in place the legislation specified that a review process was to take place this year, and that was in respect of things that the federal government has been doing over the last few months. That is to examine the current demand for coal-fired energy.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: *Palliative Care*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's report titled *Palliative Care*, which was tabled in this Parliament in April 2015. I read with great concern the report prepared by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office regarding palliative care for patients with chronic illnesses, especially given this house's highly charged and emotional debate during the last sitting week concerning dying with dignity.

Palliative care is essential for end-of-life management, particularly for those afflicted with heart disease, cancer, stroke or neurological illness. Its purpose is to ease pain and diminish stress for the patient and their family. I was interested to read that the programs and structures currently in place to assist those people who are suffering terminal illnesses or who are at the end of their life cycle are being provided with a quality of care that was unheard of 20 or 30 years ago. According to the report, approximately 36 000 people die in Victoria each year, and this figure is projected to double in the next 25 years.

I deeply admire the men and women who dedicate their professional lives to ensuring that the frightened and the frail who face their last weeks or months in sometimes strange and unfamiliar surroundings are given comfort, solace and most importantly dignity during their final journey. These are wonderfully compassionate health professionals. It is vitally critical that financial resources are adequately increased to meet the growing demand for these services. Victoria has set the standard for all of the other states to follow. However, as a relatively new area of health provision there is still considerable room for improvement.

The 2011 ongoing strategic directions policy was developed in 2004, and the Department of Health and Human Services has carriage of further developing and delivering it.

Victoria upholds the World Health Organisation's definition of palliative care — that it intends neither to hasten nor postpone death. Palliative care should not be a frightening experience, so the focus has been to provide services, wherever possible, in a home setting. While this option is more economical in financial terms, just as important is the fact that it is considered to make patients less fearful. I am sure that we would all prefer to be with our family and loved ones at this critical stage in our lives, but this is not always possible.

Consultation and collaboration with carers and family members is recognised as the preferred way of managing palliative care, with continuous and ongoing support. Emerging challenges to palliative care services are the increased demands of patients needing professionally delivered care services, together with a need to rigorously upskill our health professionals in the area of palliative care. This means appropriate funding of these essential services and practical logistic choices by patients about where they receive care: in their own home or in a community facility.

I fully support the recommendations contained in the report.

Auditor-General: *Occupational Violence against Healthcare Workers*

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report on *Occupational Violence against Healthcare Workers*. I am pleased that this report gives this important issue the focus it very much needs.

I have had a longstanding interest in this issue from a number of vantage points. On occasion I have had to

be part of the response to violence in public health workplaces. Often this becomes an occupational health and safety issue, an industrial issue, or both, because our hospitals, health centres, community health centres, ambulances and so on are also workplaces. Those who work in them are entitled, as is everyone else, to have a workplace that is a safe place to be and to work. Sometimes — in fact far too often — this does not happen.

There are many ways that injuries can occur in the health sector, but regrettably in many instances the injuries result from violence. When people think of injuries in the health sector, many people will immediately understand the risk that comes from dealing with patients who are drunk or affected by drugs. They think of emergency department injuries. It reminds me of the ambulance worker who told me his least favourite shift was Saturday night in Melbourne's CBD — and it is easy to understand the reasons why. Many of the injuries he responded to during that shift were, as he put it, self-inflicted and came at least in part because of the choices and behaviour of the person who became the patient.

Later on, when I was working with the Royal Women's Hospital, I saw more than once the surprise of those who learnt that violence and injury often arise in maternity services. I see that on page 2 the report contains a list of the high-risk settings. It states:

National and international research has identified certain settings where occupational violence is more likely to occur. These include:

emergency departments —

as we have discussed —

mental health settings

drug and alcohol clinics

paramedic call-outs

aged-care settings

maternity wards

intensive care units

other areas where high stress incidents occur or where there are few staff and limited support.

It is not something I have ever seen in a maternity ward, but I know it is a not uncommon problem, and I find it horrifying that a midwife or other staff member in the midst of delivering a baby might be a victim of violence. We need to tell these stories and find better ways to stop them happening.

One of the problems in health care is balancing the need for safety, particularly that of staff, with the issue of privacy. I saw a great example of this in action last week. Along with Ms Wooldridge and the member for Ripon in the other place I had the pleasure of visiting healthcare providers in Ararat, Maryborough, Beaufort and Stawell. Our last visit for the day was to Maryborough District Health Service. I commend the excellent work it does for locals of all ages. The Maryborough campus has a 24-hour urgent care centre staffed by experienced nursing staff trained in specialist triage care. The urgent care centre is in a building that is many decades old and that over the years has been repurposed. But it was clear to us that it needs to change so that it can function better for patients and those who care for them.

We were shown the small waiting area where locals wait to speak with a triage nurse through a perspex screen. The room was an obvious compromise between privacy and safety, and privacy was losing. Patients needed to give potentially intimate or very personal details, with other patients waiting very close by, and at the same time medical staff who were literally on the front line in delivering medical services need protection from patients who are, on occasion, highly emotional or dangerous, or both.

There are many other issues at the Maryborough health service that need attention, and I am confident that the member for Ripon will continue to raise these in her own unique, persistent, vocal and uncompromising way.

I now want to take the house to some of the contributing factors that are listed in the report as being behind these issues. Members will find them on pages 2 and 3. They are listed as the characteristics of some medical conditions, the characteristics of some individuals, the characteristics of some relationships, the organisational environmental factors and societal factors, such as attitudes towards authority.

Another thing I want to draw out — and I turn to page 30 — are the types of incidents that are classified as mild or near miss. These include being punched in the face, attempted strangulation and, I note, a pregnant staff member being kicked in the stomach. I find it quite horrifying that these incidents are classified as mild.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! I am afraid Ms Fitzherbert's time has expired.

Auditor-General: *Occupational Violence against Healthcare Workers*

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — I may actually continue, to some degree at least, on the themes that were just being discussed, because I also rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report on *Occupational Violence against Healthcare Workers*. Our healthcare workers operate in an often dangerous environment, particularly where drug use or mental illness is involved. Unfortunately danger for many healthcare workers is often seen as just part of the job.

I have some experience of this, albeit indirectly, through my father's chosen career. He migrated to Australia in his late 20s and, after having completed year 12 equivalency and then working in a whole series of jobs, he became a psychiatric nurse and worked in that role for several decades. He became a psychiatric nurse at a time when very few men were entering that profession. Through a combination of things, such as often being one of very few males on the ward and that he was confident in physical conflicts — in part because he was a martial arts expert, although I should hazard to say he never actually hurt anybody, but it gave him a certain confidence — he was often relied on in extremely difficult situations.

Even though to some degree my father became accustomed to that environment and somewhat numb to it, I believe it is not something that you ever totally become used to. Hearing about the kinds of things that he would have to put up with at work was always sobering for the rest of us in the family. It was an extremely difficult environment. For many healthcare workers it remains an extremely difficult environment. The previous speaker talked about privacy concerns, but there are also concerns around the trade-offs one faces in emergency situations where one might have to restrain a person yet also have to play that caring role. It is often very difficult to get that balance right.

I will not go through all the findings of the report in detail, but I want to focus in part on some of the findings around our understanding of occupational violence, in particular how we do not have a sufficient understanding — we do not really know how much occupational violence there is in the healthcare sector. We know there is a lot, but we do not know how much exactly. One of the issues is under-reporting, another issue is data quality and, as the previous speaker alluded, a third issue is categorisation.

Clearly it is unsatisfactory when a range of incidents that common sense tells one are serious, such as a pregnant woman being kicked in the stomach, sexually

inappropriate conduct or people being kicked and punched, is being categorised as mild, near miss or no harm. One has to question the categorisation protocols. This set of issues is very technical and in a sense transcends partisan politics. It is an issue that we all need to work towards in terms of just getting the measurements right. They are not there yet, and it is a good thing that the government is putting money towards initiatives that will hopefully improve that.

There is a series of issues around management practices in the various bodies responsible for many of our healthcare workers in these situations. Training is another area that clearly needs to be strengthened. There is also a series of issues around post-incident support, although that is one of the areas the report says is strongest. I note the government's response to this report, which involves \$20 million being put into health service violence prevention, as well as capital works for occupational safety.

This is a very important report. The series of complex issues here are going to require a longstanding effort by governments over some period of time to get right. We are talking about workers in some of the most complex environments imaginable making a whole series of trade-offs around care but also worker safety and restraint. It is a very difficult set of balances to get right. I recommend the report and the government's response to it.

Auditor-General: *Occupational Violence against Healthcare Workers*

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — I also rise to make comment on the Victorian Auditor-General's report entitled *Occupational Violence against Healthcare Workers*. Being the third person to stand up and make comment on this report, much of what I was going to say has already been said. I will not repeat what has been said, but there is a particular quote in the conclusion that typifies what this report aims to provide to the community:

There have been systemic failures across all audited agencies in relation to collecting, analysing, and reporting quality data for the purposes of continuous improvement.

That speaks volumes about where we are at the moment and where we need to move forward to, in terms of ensuring that our healthcare workers are appropriately protected in their workplaces. The government's response needs to address this and ensure, as we are moving forward, that much of what has been identified in this report is addressed.

We all recognise that those working in the health sphere are in a space in which they can find themselves in very vulnerable places. It is important that these health service workers have the appropriate support from all the relevant agencies. All front-line healthcare workers need to ensure that they have the appropriate protections. Having young children myself and having frequented emergency departments many times late at night for the myriad things my children tend to get up to, we find that there are those in our community who unfortunately are drug affected, particularly those using the drug ice. They present a particular issue for workers within the health system. Patients who are suffering the effects of ice do at times have superhuman strength and pose a significant risk to health workers, so it is very important that health workers are appropriately equipped to ensure that they can remain safe in these circumstances.

This is something that a variety of health services have raised with me as I have travelled across the electorate of Western Victoria Region, and Mr Ramsay travels across western Victoria as well. When meeting with health services, this is something that is certainly raised — that is, that we must protect those front-line health service workers to ensure that into the future they remain safe and that theirs is a workplace they are going to remain safe in and that is going to attract the very best and brightest. Thank you, Acting President, for the opportunity.

Deakin University: report 2014

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a contribution on the Deakin University annual report for 2014. Deakin celebrated its 40th anniversary in this reporting year. It has grown from a small regional university into a world leader during that time. It is in the top 3 per cent of the world's universities, and it is at the cutting edge of bringing industry and research together. I do not think anyone could contest that in any way.

The Australian Future Fibres Research and Innovation Centre is an extremely fine example of this, especially its Carbon Nexus research facility that has established research contracts with automotive supplier Multimac and Korean fibre producer Kolon. The report goes on to outline a collaboration between two Geelong-based companies, Cytomatrix and AustEng, which led to a scalable machine to produce nanofibre. The success of this collaboration has led to a joint venture between Swiss textiles manufacturer HeiQ Materials AG and Cytomatrix to form HeiQ Australia, which is to be located at the Waurn Ponds campus. This fantastic

result was funded through the Skilling the Bay program.

A \$65 million partnership between Deakin and the Rail Manufacturing Cooperative Research Centre will trial new magnetic technology at the Waurn Ponds campus, and the Cotton Rural Development Corporation has funded research into novel spinning technologies for high-quality Australian cotton yarn. Deakin is proving that bringing researchers and industry together can create jobs for the future. Geelong can stay at the forefront of manufacturing by bringing science together with a highly skilled workforce. Geelong has both of those things.

Regrettably, the report does not contain only good news. Page 16 of the report highlights an \$8.7 million decrease in state government financial assistance. Not content with ripping \$1.2 billion out of the TAFE system, the Liberal-Nationals coalition continued its war on education by attacking one of Victoria's finest higher education success stories, all of this in a city facing the closure of the automotive industry and which has already seen the closure of the Alcoa plant in Point Henry.

The state's second-biggest city faces unprecedented challenges with its manufacturing industry under siege. Deakin University has stood up to this challenge and set about creating the jobs of the future for the highly skilled workers of Geelong. It set about marrying research with industry to create much-needed jobs while the Liberal-Nationals coalition government cut funding. As if this was not bad enough, the latest federal budget has cut \$263 million from the Sustainable Research Excellence program. Deakin vice-chancellor Professor Jane den Hollander was quoted in the *Geelong Advertiser* as recently as 15 May as saying that the result was 'disappointing' and that it 'would harm Australia's ability to compete as a skilled nation in the future'.

If the budget is passed, it will mean a \$50 million a year cut to Deakin's budget. It seems that Liberal Party members do not get science and that they hate job creation. The 2014 Deakin report is a story of success in blending research and industry to create jobs. But the failed Napthine government wanted nothing to do with it, and the Abbott government is attacking it outright. To quote the vice-chancellor, again in the *Advertiser*, 'Hopefully sanity prevails'. I hope so too, and so does the Andrews Labor government, because this government believes in science. We believe in high-end skilled jobs, and we also believe that there is a place for manufacturing in Geelong. Geelong is perfectly — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Auditor-General: *Additional School Costs for Families*

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My contribution to the statements on reports and papers debate relates to the Auditor-General's report entitled *Additional School Costs for Families*, tabled in February 2015. This is another useful report from our Auditor-General. It raises a series of significant questions, and one that particularly comes to the fore today is the decision by the Andrews government to cancel the secondary college in Prahran. This is an extraordinary decision and one that will be regretted by many residents in the Stonnington area and right across the Prahran electorate.

You have to ask why the Andrews government has taken such a vicious, burnt-prairie approach to Prahran. Why has it targeted Prahran in the way it has? It is cutting the no. 8 tram. It has decided there will be no South Yarra station, which is in sharp contrast to the decision of the previous government, which was to put a connection between the new tunnel and South Yarra station to enable people to change trains and to access the full system.

The secondary college was to be located on the site formerly occupied by the Victorian College for the Deaf, which is a fantastic site. The site had been endorsed by parents, stakeholders and the whole community. The government already had \$20 million in the bank from last year's budget because of the decision made by the previous government, but the Minister for Education and Mr Dalidakis, who is clearly up to his neck in this, decided to cancel that school.

Mr Ondarchie — It is outrageous.

Mr DAVIS — It is outrageous. The truth of the matter is that between 1999 and 2010 the contribution of the then Labor government to a school in Prahran was zero. It did nothing during all of that time.

By contrast, in the period between 2010 and 2014, our government commenced the search, found the preferred site, set about doing the work and began an expression-of-interest process. We took the right steps as far as the land was concerned. But now, the minister, James Merlino, and his supporter, Philip Dalidakis, have decided there will be no such school at the location. They are going back to the drawing board. They have undone the steps that had been taken by the previous government. I have to say I am deeply

disappointed by this decision, and I think everyone in the Prahran area will be deeply disappointed.

It is clear that the scorched-earth approach that has been applied to Prahran is twofold. It is about a government that does not care about Prahran or Stonnington, those significant areas of our metropolitan area, but it also reflects a failure by the Greens member for Prahran. He has not been able to advocate strongly, and he has not been taken seriously by the current government. The scorched-earth policy implemented by Daniel Andrews with respect to Prahran is now being seen in the decision, as I said, to cancel the secondary school in Prahran.

I pay tribute to the work that was done by parents and families across the Prahran electorate in the period of the last government. I pay tribute to their commitment, their passion and their enthusiasm for having a secondary college in that area. There will be absolute fury across the Prahran electorate if it turns out that this land is gifted or finds its way to another group that is not a public secondary college. That land is the right land for a public secondary college in Prahran. Prahran needs a public secondary college — —

Mr Ondarchie — Not according to Labor.

Mr DAVIS — No, not according to Labor. But if that land goes to a private group or to a private school, there will be outright fury. Not that I have anything against private schools; they make a significant contribution across my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region and more broadly in the state. But this is an area of this state where there is a crying need for a public secondary college. The work had been done. The money had been allocated. The community support had been gained and the decision had been made. This tawdry decision by James Merlino and the scorched-earth approach that Daniel Andrews is now adopting with respect to Prahran will be seen by everyone, and everyone will be angry about — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Mr Davis's time has expired!

Auditor-General: *Additional School Costs for Families*

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Additional School Costs for Families*, which raises some serious and valid issues facing government schools and Victorian families. I thank the Auditor-General and his office for preparing this report

and bringing this serious issue to the attention of the Parliament.

The principles of free, secular and compulsory education were established under the Education Act 1872 to ensure that all students under the age of 20 had access to education regardless of their socio-economic background. However, this does not mean that attending a government school is or should be free. In fact the act permits schools to charge parents fees to cover costs such as goods and services provided to a student which are not directly related to the provision of free instruction. But this has proved to be quite problematic for schools and the Department of Education and Training (DET).

The Auditor-General identified the following issues in his report: parent payments no longer just support free instruction, they have become essential to its provision; parts of the department's parent payment policy are vague and not sufficiently prescriptive; in the absence of a clear definition of free instruction and sufficient guidance and oversight from the department, free instruction now appears to have been watered down and is limited in its application; and parents are increasingly being asked to pay for items that should be provided free of charge.

DET does not know what the actual cost of free instruction is. It distributes available funds to schools on the basis of an assessment of the needs of each school, predominantly the school's student population. Schools are not funded on the basis of what it costs to deliver free instruction or to run efficiently. The Auditor-General found that each and every year parents are being expected to pay more to educate their children at government schools. In 2013 parents paid \$310 million to schools — \$558 per student — an increase of \$70 million since 2009. This just adds further financial strain to Victorian families' hip pockets as schools expect parents to purchase uniforms, gym clothes and shoes, and other essential items such as books and stationery, which all contribute to the final cost of their children's education.

Besides the ever-increasing costs facing families, the Auditor-General highlighted in this report another serious concern facing government schools and DET, and that is that each school's individual payment expectation from parents is largely autonomous and varies significantly with minimal oversight from the department. As the report states:

Although DET has developed a parent payment policy and supporting guidance for schools, it takes no responsibility for monitoring and enforcing school compliance with these. This

means there are no consequences for schools that charge parents for items that should be provided for free.

Not only does this pose a significant transparency issue for both the department and government schools across the state but it also makes it virtually impossible for the government to ensure that all schools across the state are receiving adequate funding to ensure delivery of the correct curriculum.

This report makes a series of seven recommendations, all of which the Department of Education and Training has accepted. The Auditor-General notes that work has already taken place to resolve some of the issues identified in this audit report. I commend this report to the house.

Auditor-General: Palliative Care

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's recent report on the palliative care system. In doing so I note the legislative restrictions to the Auditor-General's remit enshrined in the Audit Act 1994, which unfortunately largely limited the audit to government community palliative care at a time when so much palliative care is being delivered in the private sector. The publication of this report is timely because this house spent time in the last sitting week talking about palliative care and end-of-life choices and gave a reference to a parliamentary committee to inquire into these matters. It is definitely an issue that is close to everyone's heart. We all want to make sure that the state provides excellent palliative care to our older population.

The report concludes that Victoria is a leader in the provision of palliative care in Australia and that the Department of Health and Human Services has set a clear and ambitious agenda for the palliative care sector. It is good news that Victoria is leading the way, but there is a lot of work ahead of us. It is important that we continue to improve our palliative care provision in this state, in both the public and private sectors.

The Auditor-General found that demand for home-based care is increasing, which is both personally preferable and more cost-effective than hospital palliative care. However, supply is struggling to catch up to that demand, producing longer waiting lists. The big takeaway from this audit is that while significant systemic improvements have been made in the past few years, the people being left behind are often the carers, usually families. Caring for anyone, especially a relative, with a terminal illness is an enormous emotional and physical challenge. Too often carers have little access to respite services and psychosocial support. Investing in these support services for carers is

a smart move fiscally as well as socially. Carers who lack support can be at risk of burnout, leading to other fiscal and socio-economic costs in the event they themselves suffer from poor mental or physical health as a result of the emotional and physical costs of providing care without support or respite.

Besides improving support services for carers, there is a need to enshrine advance care plans — or a patient's documented end-of-life preferences — across the health system, to streamline and improve bureaucratic support systems in advance. That is one of the key elements of the Labor Party's platform. This government will be doing a fair bit of work in this term on how it can advance and improve palliative care provision in this state. The parliamentary inquiry will add to that, given that it will adopt a bipartisan approach to the issue. It will be something that we can all agree on to provide the best possible palliative care in the state. With those words, I commend the report to the house.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Training and Skills, and it relates to Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE's application for funding from the TAFE Back to Work Fund. GOTAFE has applied for \$4 million to \$6 million in funding through the \$50 million TAFE Back to Work Fund to create interventions for the Hume region to address the youth disengagement problem which contributes to a range of social issues beyond unemployment. I am sure if any members saw the *Insight* program last night on SBS television, they would have seen that Shepparton in particular has a number of issues we need to address. My request of the minister is that he allocate to GOTAFE the \$4 million to \$6 million in funding it has applied for.

The Hume region is an area of significant disadvantage, and we must do all we can to break this cycle. As at July 2014 Shepparton had a youth unemployment rate of 25.3 per cent, the highest in Victoria and the third highest in Australia, behind outback South Australia and southern Tasmania. GOTAFE receiving funding through this program would mean that interventions would be able to be carried out in a relevant way, which would have an impact for the benefit of members of the

community and the Hume region more widely. It would also work towards breaking the cycle of disadvantage that is so prevalent in our region. GOTAFE would use the funding from this program to implement early intervention initiatives in secondary schools across the region as well as to deliver enhanced student welfare support services to re-engage with and support youth throughout the education and job search process.

GOTAFE's submission is based on three premises. The first is that many students abandon school before finding a career focus, which leaves them without the skills or the ambition to avoid lifelong underemployment. The second premise is that in the absence of access to suitable local labour, Victorian jobs go to workers from overseas instead. The third premise is that the cycle of local skill shortages is stifling the growth and prosperity of local business and industry. GOTAFE's strategic focus is therefore to capture, understand and meet the needs of at-risk early and middle years secondary students before academic disengagement; to redesign entry-level courses to attract youth back into training as well as to meet industry's expectations and needs for employability; and to establish industry sector networks for student placements as interns or employees.

This issue is serious in Shepparton and in the broader Hume region. As I said, the *Insight* program last night outlined many of the concerns of people in our region about what is happening there at the moment. We need interventions to assist us to change that and to give our young people in the region greater hope for the future. This goes beyond political partisanship. This is something that Parliament as a whole should be working on to address youth disadvantage. My request of the minister is that the minister allocate to GOTAFE the \$4 million to \$6 million in funding it has applied for.

Furlong Road, St Albans, level crossing

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Public Transport, the Honourable Jacinta Allan, and relates to my concerns over the removal of the Furlong Road, St Albans, level crossing. Recently I raised my concerns over the commencement date of construction in relation to the St Albans level crossing, which has been addressed by the minister. In fact construction has begun at that crossing, which is very pleasing to see. Today I wish to raise the Furlong Road level crossing, because I feel that it is equally as important as the Main Road, St Albans, crossing to the people in my electorate. However, no further information about this

crossing's removal has been made available since the removal commitment was made last year.

Like the Main Road, St Albans, crossing, the Furlong Road level crossing has savagely taken innocent lives. I share in the frustration of my constituents, who confront attempting to cross the level crossing during peak times; I have sat waiting for over 30 minutes in some instances. In 2008 the crossing was ranked as one of the most dangerous in the state, with three people having been killed there in a single accident in 2004 and at least one other fatality 10 years earlier. In October 2011, 15-year-old Teresa Ho was struck and killed by a V/Line train whilst crossing the tracks.

Unlike the previous government, which refused to commit to the removal of this crossing and instead redirected funds to a crossing ranked much lower by the transport department, the Andrews Labor government has made a commitment to ensure that dangerous level crossings will no longer pose an unnecessary threat to the lives of Victorians by removing 50 of Victoria's worst level crossings. It has committed to Furlong Road among these 50. Instead of wiping out infrastructure development for the next 10 years in Victoria by building the east-west tunnel, this government understands that Victorians want to see dangerous level crossings as things of the past and that it is this government which can deliver that.

In addition to the Furlong Road and Main Road, St Albans, level crossings, the Andrews Labor government has committed to the removal of the Melton Highway level crossing, which has also caused unnecessary deaths and traffic congestion issues. I am very proud to be part of this government, which has put the safety of Victorians high on the agenda — and that is why I raise the Furlong Road level crossing today. I ask the Minister for Public Transport: when will construction begin on the removal of the Furlong Road level crossing, and when does the government expect the removal to be completed?

Challenge Family Violence

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police. It relates to the very important Challenge Family Violence prevention project, which is one of 12 community-based, community-focused programs to reduce violence against women and children across Victoria. The Challenge Family Violence prevention project is a partnership between the justice department, the Shire of Cardinia, the City of Casey and the City of Greater Dandenong. Regrettably, it would appear that this project has received no new funding in the recent

Andrews government budget, and its funding will expire in November this year. I have some personal experience of this project, having met with a group of mentors at the City of Casey council offices and having participated in a breakfast and other projects run by the Shire of Cardinia.

We all understand the challenge of reducing violence against women and children. Part of that is driving behavioural change, principally among men, and part of that is encouraging community leaders to stand up and speak out when they see inappropriate behaviour and hear inappropriate comments. This project is all about working with community leaders to tackle that issue.

In an article in the *Pakenham Gazette* state government spokesperson Kosta Pandos is reported as saying that future funding would be considered as part of the Royal Commission into Family Violence early next year. The article goes on to quote Mr Pandos as saying:

The Andrews Labor government has embarked on Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence that will determine the best ways to prevent and address this harm.

I bring to Mr Pandos's attention the fact that the Australian Institute of Criminology has reviewed progress and produced an interim evaluation report on reducing violence against women and their children. In relation to the Challenge Family Violence prevention project — and I quote from page 7 of the report:

... the evaluators found that the project had generated positive changes in mentors, meeting its first key performance indicator.

The report goes on to say that the second and third performance indicators had also been met. It states:

Finally, the evaluators found the training had achieved the project's third key performance indicator by developing participants' skills and confidence in discerning and countering attitudes and behaviours supportive of violence against women.

I would therefore say to the government that this project has already been evaluated and found to be having a positive impact in the community. Funding will run out in November prior to the royal commission delivering its findings and prior to the government having an opportunity to fund the recommendations of the royal commission. I ask Minister Noonan, as the minister responsible for these projects, to again fund this project and give it some certainty.

Victorian Racing Industry Fund

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister

for Racing, and it relates to the bolstered Victorian Racing Industry Fund (VRIF). Members in this place know that racing is an important economic driver in Victoria, generating \$2.8 billion of economic activity and supporting more than 26 000 full-time jobs, many of which are in regional and rural Victoria. In fact as I understand it close to 80 per cent of trainers and breeders call regional Victoria home. Country racing contributes nearly \$1 billion a year to economic output.

In the 2015–16 budget \$72 million in new funding was directed to the Victorian Racing Industry Fund and over \$14 million left unspent since the commencement of the fund was carried over. The Victorian Racing Industry Fund is funded by returning unclaimed wagering dividends and on-course wagering taxes to industry. The three racing codes, racing clubs and other key stakeholders have a say in the growing Victorian racing industry.

This \$86 million will enable the government to focus on integrity and governance programs, upgrades to infrastructure and facilities, particularly in regional areas, and race day attraction programs. The chief executive of Racing Victoria, Bernard Saundry, who represents 70 000 participants and 14 member groups, welcomed the VRIF announcement. He said that this fund:

... helps deliver our strategic plan to grow and develop Victorian thoroughbred racing, whilst ensuring that Victoria can continue racing at 62 country racetracks, which are vital for the local community.

The chairman of Harness Racing Victoria, Ken Latta, also commented positively on what the Andrews government's budget has produced in terms of the industry. I note that the budget was handed down on the opening day, Brierly Day, of the Warrnambool carnival this year. This carnival is a shining example of the economic benefit of racing to Victoria.

The action I seek of the minister is that he advise me on how the government intends to use the \$86 million from the Victorian Racing Industry Fund to strengthen regional racing and ensure a continued economic benefit to country communities.

Commercial netting fishing licences

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — The matter I raise tonight is directed to the Minister for Agriculture. I have previously stated on many occasions my recognition and support of the government's fishing policy, in particular its commitment to remove the operators of the 42 commercial fishing licences from

our bay. I do, however, raise concerns about the length of time it will take to implement this commitment.

Every night several boats are reported to be operating in Corio Bay, with very little scrutiny or inspection by officers. It is believed that a 'take what we can get while we can' attitude has been adopted. This increase in activity will have devastating effects, and I fear that more instances will occur, similar to last August when in a Department of Environment and Primary Industries investigation 25 penguins were found to have been killed by a commercial fishing net.

I ask that the minister increase inspections and compliance activities in relation to commercial netters while this process is undertaken.

Retirement housing sector

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. The Greens welcome the government's announcement of a consumer awareness campaign to help Victorians make informed decisions about retirement villages. This is a step forward in recognising that many retirees are being ripped off in their purchase of retirement housing. However, a consumer campaign really does not go far enough. Quality, affordable retirement housing is incredibly important to ensure that older people feel comfortable and confident in their housing as they age. Unfortunately many people have had the opposite experience. They have been burdened with unfair costs and bad treatment.

Currently the various retirement housing types, such as caravan parks, independent living units, residential parks and retirement villages, are governed by complex and inadequate regulation and can be mismanaged. Contracts can be complicated and include technicalities and unspecified costs. They can be almost impossible for a lay person to decipher. This has meant that some older people have lost their life savings, got locked into contracts or ended up homeless. Further, there is a lack of clear and accessible dispute resolution avenues, which leaves older people feeling bullied with nowhere to go. The sector suffers from under-regulation and insufficient consumer protections.

We need legislative reform so that retirement housing contracts are standardised and simplified and there can be no hidden or unspecified costs. It is all very well for a retiree to be aware of the risks, as will happen with the campaign, if indeed the consumer awareness campaign actually reaches that person, but it is another thing to properly understand a legal contract and

foresee technicalities that can lead to massive hidden costs. The people entering into these contracts are not businesspeople or legal experts, and many cannot afford proper legal advice. This is a dark corner of the housing market that desperately needs some light shed on it.

The action I seek from the government is that it initiate a parliamentary committee inquiry into the retirement housing sector, including residential villages, caravan parks, residential parks and independent living units, and the Retirement Villages Act 1986. The inquiry should report on and make recommendations for reform of retirement housing legislation to ensure that it reflects the diversity of retirement housing types — currently it does not — and includes proper consumer protections, dispute resolution procedures, fair pricing and consistent and simplified management standards and regulations across the sector.

Geelong planning authority

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Planning, Richard Wynne, and it relates to bold statements made by Daniel Andrews in November 2013, when he was the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, at Skilled Stadium in Geelong that Labor would create a Geelong planning authority to coordinate the Vision 2 revitalisation of the Geelong CBD with the City of Greater Geelong and other stakeholders.

At the time Mr Andrews made a host of promises as part of a jobs plan that included constructing an extension of the Geelong Ring Road to the Bellarine Peninsula and creating Victoria's next container port between Geelong and Werribee. Not surprisingly, today the port idea has been blown out of the water by the government's proposal of a 50-year lease for the port of Melbourne. This proposal has all sorts of strings attached, one being that there be no competition for the port of Melbourne. Not a cent of the proceeds of these leasing arrangements will be provided to regional Victoria, and there is the prospect of higher user charges for the biggest users of the port, Victorian farmers. In its latest budget the government has made no commitment to an extension of the Geelong Ring Road to the Bellarine Peninsula or to the creation of a Geelong planning authority.

The City of Greater Geelong could not wait for the minister to formulate a model. It is currently making decisions to revitalise the CBD under the leadership of the mayor, Darryn Lyons. A CBD task force is already overseeing the Vision 2 proposals to revitalise the city

despite the fact that Labor promised to create an authority that would have vested in it the powers required to coordinate the implementation of Vision 2. Much of Vision 2 was initiated by stakeholders in the Geelong community and supported by the then Minister for Planning, Matthew Guy, now the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly. When the Leader of the Opposition is next in Geelong, I invite him to look at the good work that is already happening without the assistance of the proposed planning authority.

The City of Greater Geelong has not been advised of the progress of the proposed Geelong planning authority model or the timing of its introduction through an act of Parliament. Further, the government has not made any statement about the authority. I ask the minister to inform me and the Geelong community of the current status of the proposed model, the process of consultation with local partners on its design and the current discussions with the City of Greater Geelong, given the public support for a convention centre, a pier to accommodate cruise ships, an international airport terminal at Avalon and a potential new manufacturing hub to accommodate new businesses.

A planning authority is required now for these larger scale projects, and given Labor made its commitment in 2013 when in opposition, we can only assume it is going to honour that commitment now it is in government.

Emerald Secondary College

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Education. I ask that he visit Emerald Secondary College. This visit would follow up on Emerald Secondary College receiving \$1.5 million in the budget in order to replace school portables with purpose-built facilities for special needs students.

During his visit the minister would receive an update on the investment in new infrastructure, and we would undertake consultation with school leaders. Students in Gembrook were big winners in the Andrews government's first education state budget, and Emerald Secondary College will receive \$1.5 million for new, purpose-built infrastructure.

As everybody in this chamber is no doubt aware, special needs students often have more complex requirements and require particular teaching techniques. This means they often also require particular infrastructure. This is one school out of many in the state that had been calling out for purpose-built facilities for its special needs students. Many other

schools within Eastern Victoria Region benefited as a result of the most recent budget, including, for example, Sale Specialist School, which had been crying out for funding. Ms Shing and I were both very happy to see that school receive funding.

Emerald Secondary College is one school that did get extra funding in the budget for special needs students. This is part of a broader \$730 million school infrastructure funding program, which is only one part of a multibillion-dollar education and training program. Over \$3 billion went into education, part of which was for infrastructure and part of which was for broader funding support.

I have been advised that the funding that will go to Emerald Secondary College will be provided in 2015–16 and that members of the school leadership team have already attended training that will enable them to begin work on the first phase of the asset management plan. It is expected that the asset management plan will be completed this calendar year, and it is hoped that the school will be ready to progress to tender later in the year. I look forward to the minister visiting Emerald Secondary College and receiving an update on this important piece of infrastructure and undertaking consultation with school leaders.

Autism services

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. This matter has arisen following comments made yesterday in the other place by the member for Yan Yean. She referred to the plight of many families in the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne who have to travel 3 hours or more to get a child with autism to school.

It has come to my attention that there is a dearth of autism educational services in the outer northern suburbs. I must commend my colleague Mr Ondarchie for the work he has been putting into this area for quite some time. I have visited the outer north twice in the last month or so, and I am very concerned about the needs of families in that area who have children with autism.

The impact autism can have on families is quite extraordinary. There are various pressures for those who have a child with autism, or, as is usually the case, children with autism. These pressures may be faced by not only mothers and fathers but also siblings, and they can quite often lead to family break-ups. Unfortunately that is one of the tragic side effects of being in this particular situation.

The last thing these families need is to be worried about where they are going to take their kids to school, and the last thing they need is to be concerned that their child might not be able to get a proper education. This is not just a problem for people in the outer north. I hear from people right around the state that this is a major issue, and I am very hopeful that it will be addressed very soon.

In this particular instance I am asking the minister for a total review of educational services for children with autism in Melbourne's north. I hope the minister will agree to this. I certainly believe that it is needed. I do not believe this is a partisan matter. Both sides of the house can be as one on this issue. However, I certainly believe Victoria is way behind when it comes to autism services, particularly in the instance of the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne. As I say, I ask the minister for a review of autism services in Melbourne's north, followed by action to right the wrongs of the current situation and to provide the services necessary to give these children a chance.

Southland railway station

Mr DALIDAKIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, the Honourable Jacinta Allan. The issue of Southland railway station has been on the political landscape for a number of decades, under many different governments of both political persuasions. In the lead-up to the 2010 election the then Brumby government committed a significant amount of money to the construction of the station and the then opposition committed a small amount of money to it. Subsequently Mr Baillieu was elected as Premier — —

Mr Davis — On a point of order, President, I am just drawing the member's attention to the fact that he has made a statement which I know to be incorrect.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is a matter of debate. Mr Davis has the chance in other forums of the house to correct the member if he thinks he is wrong. I ask the member to continue, without assistance.

Mr DALIDAKIS — A minor amount was committed by the then Premier, Mr Baillieu, but after four years that station was not built. In the lead-up to the last election, the Andrews-led opposition again committed to building that station, and for the community's sake it finally looks like it is going to be delivered, as I said, after a number of decades. The Minister for Public Transport should be congratulated on undertaking a degree of community consultation in relation to Southland station to ensure that basic

facilities — for example, toilets — will be included in the project.

When the new station at Southland opens, it is forecast to become one of the busiest stations on the Frankston line. The new station will provide direct and safe access to Southland for shoppers and staff, as well as improving public transport access for the local community. The term 'destination station' has been used in consultations to help explain that the majority of people using the station will be travelling to and from the shopping centre. Some members of the local community have questioned whether the station will be open beyond Southland's normal operating hours if the main role of the station is to facilitate access to the shopping centre. Other members of the community have expressed concerns that the nearby Sir William Fry Reserve might be used for car parking. As such, my adjournment matter for the minister is to ask whether she can provide an assurance that the reserve will not be used for commuter car parking and a commitment that the station will remain open outside shopping centre hours for use by the local community.

Sports funding

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer. At the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings there was an incredibly embarrassing situation where the Minister for Sport claimed that the country football netball program was funded in the budget, but laughably, he was unable to point out where this \$2 million line item existed. Just yesterday the same minister also stated that the Shooting Sports Facilities program, a \$9.8 million fund left in the budget by the previous government, is also continuing. Yet the minister is unable to point to anywhere in the budget where that money exists. There is also the matter of the Significant Sporting Infrastructure program that had \$18 million re-prioritised in *Labor's Financial Statement 2014*, which was released two days before the election. All the moneys in the Significant Sporting Infrastructure program have been allocated to local councils for specific projects, and funding agreements have been put in place, with contracts allocated and the like.

I am hoping the Treasurer may be able to give me the information I have not been able to receive via the Minister for Sport. My adjournment action is quite simply that the Treasurer inform me as to where the funds are going to come from for these three programs — \$2 million for the country football netball program, \$9.8 million for the Shooting Sports Facilities program and \$18 million that was reprioritised out of the Significant Sporting Infrastructure program — as

they have already been allocated to projects around the state.

Box Hill Institute

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is directed to the Minister for Training and Skills, and it relates to a number of applications that Box Hill Institute of TAFE has forwarded to the \$50 million TAFE Back to Work Fund. This is a fund that is on top of the \$320 million TAFE Rescue Fund — it is quite an exciting fund.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr LEANE — I am pleased that Mr Drum is happy to share my enthusiasm for this particular rescue fund and for the TAFE Back to Work Fund. I am seeking that Minister Herbert seriously takes into account the applications made by Box Hill Institute of TAFE to this fund.

City of Stonnington public transport

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport, and it concerns South Yarra railway station and transport in the Prahran electorate and the city of Stonnington. I am in receipt of a note from the minister in response to an adjournment matter raised on 15 April this year specifically in relation to South Yarra railway station. As background to this adjournment matter, it is worth quoting from the note:

A new station at South Yarra is not part of the Melbourne Metro project, however that does not mean that improvements to South Yarra station will not occur in the future.

I accept that improvements will occur in the future, and I would expect them to occur in the future as stations are upgraded in a routine way. What is important is that people in the Stonnington area, in South Yarra in particular, understand the importance of connecting that major station — one of the busiest in the metropolitan area — to the new Melbourne Metro system that the government is proposing. The importance of this is that the line going out towards Cranbourne and so forth will pass underneath South Yarra station — about 40 metres deep, as I understand it. The previous government had a proposal to build a station there and connect its Melbourne Metro rail project to South Yarra to enable people to change to different lines and access them more easily.

The minister's response also mentions the route 8 tram, as we have known it since 1927, which I think is the

original date it began. It is clear that the route 8 tram will be abolished. The minister seems to dispute that, but all the maps I have seen — and I certainly reference the *Age* in this respect — and the leak to Fairfax media make it clear that some of the most overcrowded tram routes in Melbourne have been targeted for change. In the case of the route 8 tram between Moreland and Toorak, it will be a permanent discontinuation — abolition. The detailed map attached to the leak to Fairfax media made it clear that the route 8 tram is to be abolished. You will not be able to move down Toorak Road, up St Kilda Road, through Swanston Street past Flinders Street and up to Melbourne University without a series of changes.

The minister seems to dispute that the route 8 tram is to be abolished, saying that it is not being cancelled and that any future changes to the tram route will be undertaken in consultation with the community. I would argue that it is being cancelled, and for that reason I seek that the minister review the public transport options in Prahran and around South Yarra to make sure that a connection to South Yarra occurs.

Responses

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — There were 13 matters raised by members in the adjournment debate tonight. Ms Lovell raised a matter for the attention of Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, in relation to GOTAFE and the TAFE Rescue Fund.

A further matter for the attention of Mr Herbert was raised by Mr Leane in relation to Box Hill TAFE.

A number of members raised matters for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan. Mr Davis raised a matter in relation to the South Yarra railway station.

Mr Eideh raised a matter in relation to the Furlong Road, St Albans, level crossing.

Mr Dalidakis raised a matter in relation to the Southland railway station.

Mr O'Donohue raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police regarding a project in relation to family violence and funding for that project.

Ms Tierney raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Racing in relation to the Regional Racing Infrastructure Fund and the role it can play in supporting racing in regional Victoria.

Mr Drum had a matter for the attention of the Treasurer in relation to sporting funds and the place and manner in which they can be identified in the budget papers.

Ms Hartland had a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in relation to retirement housing contracts and is seeking an inquiry into that matter.

Mr Ramsay had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, Mr Wynne, in relation to a Geelong planning authority.

Mr Mulino raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education in relation to Emerald Secondary College.

Mr Finn also raised his matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. In that matter Mr Finn was seeking a review of the availability of services for people with autism spectrum disorder, particularly in Melbourne's outer northern suburbs.

Mr Young raised a matter for my attention. He is seeking a commitment from the government that it will increase inspections and compliance monitoring in the lead-up to the work that is underway to cease netting in Port Phillip Bay. There are 43 affected licence-holders for whom this will be a period of considerable transition. Mr Young expressed a view that recreational fishers in particular want us to continue to deliver on this election commitment at as quick a pace as possible.

I am certainly pleased to provide Mr Young with the assurance that the government will be delivering on this election commitment. We will be doing so as quickly as possible. We are in a position to increase inspections and compliance in the period of transition. Our policy includes a sliding cap measure which will provide benefits sooner rather than later to recreational fishers as the buyout commences. This is a complex reform.

I am also now in a position to inform the house that I have recently appointed a former Independent MP in the Assembly, a former member for Gippsland East, Craig Ingram, who is known to many, although not everybody, in this place, to serve in an important role in the delivery of this Target One Million election commitment, as a special adviser to support the industry transition. This will be a challenging time for those 43 licence-holders, but we want to do this in the most reasonable and measured way we possibly can, cognisant of the change and the significant challenge that this policy will present to those existing licence-holders. I can assure Mr Young that we will be delivering on this election commitment, we will be

delivering on it in full and we will be doing it as quickly as possible.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Are there any written responses?

Ms PULFORD — No, there are no written responses this evening.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.15 p.m.

