

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 7 October 2015

(Extract from book 14)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AM

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

The ministry

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Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water	The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP
Minister for Police and Minister for Corrections	The Hon. W. M. Noonan, MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Racing	The Hon. M. P. Pakula, MP
Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development	The Hon. J. L. Pulford, MLC
Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence	The Hon. F. Richardson, MP
Minister for Finance and Minister for Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. R. D. Scott, MP
Minister for Planning	The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Ms M. Kairouz, MP

Legislative Council committees

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

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

Legislative Council standing committees

Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure — Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr Morris, Mr Ondarchie and Ms Tierney.

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

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

participating members

Legislative Council select committees

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

Joint committees

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

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

Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee — (*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Elasmarr and Mr Melhem. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Nardella and Ms Ryall.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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

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Deputy President: Ms G. TIERNEY

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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

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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
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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

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Wednesday, 7 October 2015

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 9.35 a.m. and read the prayer.

PETITIONS

Following petition presented to house:

Grand Final Friday

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

At a time of high and rising unemployment and when many businesses are already doing it tough, Daniel Andrews's new grand final parade public holiday will impose a major new cost that will see many businesses close their doors for the day, employees lose much-needed shifts and significant damage inflicted on our state's economy. The Andrews government's own assessment of the cost of new public holidays to Victoria is nearly \$900 million per year.

The impact of these additional costs will not be restricted to businesses, with local government and hospitals also affected, leaving ratepayers and the community to foot the bill. We therefore call on the Daniel Andrews Labor government to reverse its decision to introduce the grand final parade public holiday.

By Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) (331 signatures).

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Albury Wodonga Health — Report, 2014–15.

Alexandra District Health — Report, 2014–15.

Alfred Health — Report, 2014–15.

Alpine Health — Report, 2014–15.

Ambulance Victoria — Report, 2014–15.

Auditor-General's Office — Report, 2014–15.

Auditor-General's Reports on —

Delivering Services to Citizens and Consumers via Devices of Personal Choice: Phase 2, October 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Financial System Controls Report: Information Technology 2014–15, October 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Austin Health — Report, 2014–15.

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Ballarat General Cemeteries Trust — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Ballarat Health Services — Report, 2014–15.

Barwon Health — Report, 2014–15.

Beaufort and Skipton Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Beechworth Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Benalla Health — Report, 2014–15.

Bendigo Cemeteries Trust — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Bendigo Health Care Group — Report, 2014–15.

Boort District Hospital — Report, 2014–15.

Calvary Health Care Bethlehem Ltd — Report, 2014–15.

Casterton Memorial Hospital — Report, 2014–15.

Castlemaine Health — Report, 2014–15.

Central Gippsland Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Cobram District Hospital — Report, 2014–15.

Cohuna Community Nursing Home Inc. — Report, 2014–15.

Colac Area Health — Report, 2014–15.

Confiscation Act 1997 — Report 2014–15 under section 139A by Victoria Police.

Dental Health Services Victoria — Report, 2014–15.

Disability Services Commissioner — Report, 2014–15.

Djerriwarrh Health Services — Report, 2014–15.

Docklands Studios Melbourne Pty Ltd — Report, 2014–15.

Dunmunkle Health Services — Report, 2014–15.

East Grampians Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

East Wimmera Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Eastern Health — Report, 2014–15.

Echuca Regional Health — Report, 2014–15.

Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital — Report, 2014–15.

Emerald Tourist Railway Board — Report, 2014–15.

Film Victoria — Report, 2014–15.

Geelong Cemeteries Trust — Report, 2014–15.

Geelong Performing Arts Centre — Report, 2014–15.

Gippsland Southern Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Goulburn Valley Health — Report, 2014–15.

Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust — Report, 2014–15.

Health Purchasing Victoria — Report, 2014–15.

Health Services Commissioner — Report, 2014–15.

- Heathcote Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Hepburn Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Hesse Rural Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Heywood Rural Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Inglewood and Districts Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Kerang District Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Kilmore and District Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Kooweerup Regional Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Kyabram District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Kyneton District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Latrobe Regional Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Library Board of Victoria — Report, 2014–15.
- Lorne Community Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Maldon Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Mallee Track Health and Community Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Mansfield District Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Maryborough District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Melbourne Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Melbourne Recital Centre Ltd — Report, 2014–15.
- Mental Health Complaints Commissioner — Report, 2014–15.
- Mental Health Tribunal — Report, 2014–15.
- Mercy Public Hospitals Inc. — Report, 2014–15.
- Metropolitan Planning Authority — Report, 2014–15.
- Mildura Cemetery Trust — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.
- Monash Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Moyne Health Services — Report, 2014–15.
- Museums Board of Victoria — Report, 2014–15.
- Nathalia District Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Northeast Health Wangaratta — Report, 2014–15.
- Northern Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Numurkah District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Ombudsman — Report, 2014–15 (*Ordered to be published*).
- Omeo District Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Orbost Regional Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Otway Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Peninsula Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre — Report, 2014–15.
- Portland District Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Queen Elizabeth Centre — Report, 2014–15.
- Radiation Advisory Committee — Report, 2014–15.
- Robinvale District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Rochester and Elmore District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.
- Royal Children's Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Royal Women's Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- Rural Northwest Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Seymour District Memorial Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- South Gippsland Hospital — Report, 2014–15.
- South West Healthcare — Report, 2014–15.
- Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust — Report, 2014–15.
- St Vincent's Hospital (Melbourne) Ltd — Report, 2014–15.
- Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament —
- Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992 — No. 108.
 - Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — No. 110.
 - Freedom of Information Act 1982 — No. 111.
 - Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 — No. 109.
 - Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 — No. 112.
- Stawell Regional Health — Report, 2014–15.
- Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —
- Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rules Nos. 104 to 107.
 - Legislative Instruments and related documents under 16B in respect of —
 - Electronic conveyancing operating requirements (Version 3), 30 September 2015, under the Electronic Conveyancing (Adoption of National Law) Act 2013.
 - Electronic conveyancing participation rules (Version 3), 30 September 2015, under the Electronic Conveyancing (Adoption of National Law) Act 2013.
 - Order in Council declaring VicRoads as a specified entity, 29 September 2015, under the Financial Management Act 1994.

Registrar's requirements for paper conveyancing transactions (Version 1), 30 September 2015, under the Transfer of Land Act 1958.

Surveillance Devices Act 1999 — Reports 2014–15 pursuant to section 30L by the —

Australian Crime Commission.

Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

Game Management Authority.

Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission.

Swan Hill District Health — Report, 2014–15.

Tallangatta Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Terang and Mortlake Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Timboon and District Healthcare Service — Report, 2014–15.

Tweddle Child and Family Health Service — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Upper Murray Health and Community Services — Report, 2014–15.

Victorian Arts Centre Trust — Report 2014–15.

Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) — Report, 2014–15.

Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health — Report, 2014–15.

Victorian Pharmacy Authority — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

West Wimmera Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Western District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Western Health — Report, 2014–15.

Wimmera Health Care Group — Report, 2014–15.

Yarram and District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Yarrawonga District Health Service — Report, 2014–15.

Yea and District Memorial Hospital — Report, 2014–15.

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Membership

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

That Mr Bourman be appointed to the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Infrastructure Victoria board

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I want to do something novel in the Parliament of Victoria: I want to make the very first announcement of certain outcomes in the Parliament. This has not been publicly announced prior to my ministers statement this morning. The government has established by law Infrastructure Victoria, and I will now announce the membership of the board of Infrastructure Victoria. This will be publicly announced outside of the Parliament subsequent to my announcement in the Parliament.

I am very pleased to say to the chamber that we have been joined by some excellent independent board members who will make up the body that will provide guidance to the Victorian community about our long-term infrastructure needs.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I actually think this is a very welcome precedent. From my point of view as a person who believes in the institution of Parliament, I think this is one of the better things that has happened in a long, long time. To have a minister making an announcement that is absolutely new and is to the benefit of the house in terms of the information and to have that minister heckled with interjections is just not on. I hear another peep, and that person can go to morning tea.

Mr JENNINGS — I thank you, President, for your support of Infrastructure Victoria and the importance of the nature of this announcement. I will announce that Jim Miller, who is a current deputy chair of Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, a former executive director at Macquarie Capital, from 1994 to this year, and a person of great and extensive knowledge about infrastructure right across this nation who is well regarded in the finance and construction

industries, in the public policy and academia areas and in all the financial institutions across Australia, will chair Infrastructure Victoria as it acquires its important work. He will be joined by Maria Wilton, an expert in financial services and financial management and a director of the Financial Services Council and the National Breast Cancer Foundation. They will be joined by Margaret Gardner, the vice-chancellor of Monash University, and Ann Sherry, who has extensive experience in infrastructure and banking matters. They will be joined by the secretaries of the relevant agencies — the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Treasury and Finance, and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning — in doing that important work for Victoria into the future.

Early childhood educators

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to update the house on the significant milestone achieved in the early childhood educators enterprise bargaining process. On 24 September the parties announced that a key milestone had been reached, with the parties signing a heads of agreement. This paves the way for a deal to be finalised; the previous Liberal government had stalled it for two years. For two years early childhood services and educators felt the cost of Liberal government inaction as the industrial dispute rolled on unaddressed. Last year Victorian families felt the cost of inaction by the Liberal government when kinder teachers and educators took stop-work action. Before the election Labor made a commitment to help the employer associations and the Australian Education Union resolve the dispute. We have delivered on that promise. Since February we have provided assistance in continuing talks between the parties.

It is encouraging to see that an in-principle agreement has now been reached on the key terms and conditions. The heads of agreement recognise the importance of early childhood teachers and educators and will see teachers and educators being offered improved salary structures and increased opportunities for career progression. Importantly, this agreement will deliver pay parity between preschool teachers and school teachers.

The agreement will support the early childhood sector to attract and retain talented and highly qualified staff, meaning a better deal for Victorian children and their families. This will provide a significant boost to quality through the attracting and retaining of excellent teachers and educators in kindergartens — and we know parents value high quality early learning.

It is also important to note that the agreement reached is consistent with the government's wages policy whilst achieving greater flexibility in rostering arrangements for service providers. The new agreement is another step forward in the Labor government's positive agenda for early childhood services and in making Victoria the education state.

This is a good deal for Victorian families, who felt the cost of inaction on the part of the Liberal government, and a good deal for our early childhood teachers and educators. This is a win for Victorian families, who will benefit from their children getting greater value out of the time they spend at kinder and being better prepared for school and life.

Recreational fishing grants

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I wish to inform the house that angling clubs and community organisations hoping to improve fishing opportunities can now apply for funding, complementing the government's Target One Million initiative. The 2015–16 recreational fishing grants program is now open to fishing clubs, community groups, incorporated bodies, registered companies and government and statutory bodies.

The grants program reinvests revenue from the sale of recreational fishing licences into projects that benefit this popular pastime and ensure sustainable fisheries now and into the future. Project proposals between \$5000 and \$100 000 qualify for the large grants component of the program; applications for these close on 29 February 2016. Large grants can be used for projects relating to fisheries sustainability and habitat improvement; fishing access and facilities; fisheries-related education, information and training; and recreational fisheries research. The small grants, of up to \$5000, are available year round.

Recreational fishing contributes significantly to the social and economic wellbeing of people in Melbourne and regional Victoria, so we need good ideas for the right projects in the right places. We would like to see project applications that will really make a difference to local anglers and make it easier for newcomers to wet a line.

These grants will deliver better facilities, better knowledge and better fishing opportunities for our anglers. These licence-funded projects complement the Andrews Labor government's Target One Million plan for recreational fishing that aims to get Victorians fishing more often by boosting participation to 1 million anglers by 2020.

We want to grow recreational fishing in Victoria, and as members might be aware, the 2015 Victorian budget delivered \$20 million to kickstart this plan, including the cessation of commercial netting in Port Phillip and Corio bays, increasing fish stocks, improving fishing and boating facilities and helping local clubs promote this great pastime. I urge all members to share this information with their communities.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Great Forest National Park

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My office recently took part in the parliamentary internship program, hosting Hamish Scully from Monash University. Mr Scully researched and wrote a detailed report on the economic and social benefits of the creation of the Great Forest National Park, east of Melbourne. The report looks at various economic benefits, which include tourism investment and recreational and non-quantifiable values. Currently Victorian national parks employ over 41 000 people, and visitors to these parts generate around \$2.6 billion for the Victorian economy each year.

Several pertinent case studies, such as those on the Yarra Valley, Dandenongs, Grampians and Wilsons Promontory national parks, show that there is significant economic value in the creation of national parks. For instance, for every dollar spent by state government in the Grampians National Park there is a benefit to the Victorian economy of \$21.

There is still no word on the terms of reference for the industry task force. I suggest its members read this report, work out what has to happen to transition the timber industry to plantation and get on with a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council investigation into a Great Forest National Park, so the state can reap the benefits for our economy, society, health and wellbeing, environment and the Leadbeater's possum.

I commend the work of Mr Scully and the parliamentary internship program, and I am delighted to release this report so we can all understand the economic development opportunities that are there for the taking.

Luke Batty

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the coroner's recent report into the death of Luke Batty. In doing so I want to pay tribute to the tireless campaigning of his mother, Ms Rosie Batty,

whom the coroner recognises as a loving, caring, intelligent and thoughtful mother.

The coroner found the responsibility for Luke's murder lies with his deceased father, Greg Anderson, and no-one else. There is no validated risk assessment tool that can accurately predict whether a parent is likely to commit such a horrible crime. Luke's murder came after years of domestic violence by his father towards both Luke and his mother. Mr Anderson's reasons for killing his son remain unknown. Ms Batty has suggested a possible reason was that Luke was growing older and wished to withdraw from his father, and that Mr Anderson wished to control his son.

This vindicates what many have said about the need to change the idea that some men still have that women are to be controlled by men. While no individual other than Mr Anderson is responsible for Luke's death, there are gaps in the system that must be fixed. Many recommendations have been made by the coroner, which hopefully the government will adopt. For example, we need to reduce delays in executing warrants and serving family violence intervention orders. These sorts of delays resulted in protective measures for Luke expiring.

Bail for domestic violence perpetrators needs to be reconsidered. The coroner advises introducing warning flags into police systems to identify high-risk perpetrators in order to address this problem. While the coroner stated that Luke's death was not foreseeable by anyone, the gaps in the system must be fixed.

Peninsula Link signage

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I would like to congratulate the federal member for Dunkley, Bruce Billson, on securing \$125 000 from the commonwealth government to upgrade signage along the Peninsula Link. Mr Billson, in close consultation with the relevant state and local authorities, has secured 32 new signs, which will be installed, and 14 alterations will be made to existing signs along Peninsula Link and its approaches. New township directional signage will be installed for Baxter, Langwarrin, Mornington, Mount Eliza, Frankston, Mount Martha, Cranbourne, Tooradin, Portsea, Somerville, Tyabb, Hastings, Flinders and Phillip Island.

While Peninsula Link has been a great piece of infrastructure for local residents and tourists alike, there have been ongoing discussions about the directional signage and the inability of tourists and people new to the area to identify the correct turn-offs for particular tourist locations or towns.

Mr Billson has been a tireless campaigner for this project over several years. He secured a commitment from the commonwealth coalition government, and he has continued to fight to make sure this is implemented. Now that the approvals have been given, I congratulate him on this project, which will help tourists and local residents alike.

National Police Remembrance Day

Mr O'DONOHUE — Finally, I congratulate Victoria Police on the National Police Remembrance Day activities last week. They were a fitting tribute to the fallen men and women of Victoria Police.

Mobile Black Spot program

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to congratulate the Andrews Labor government on its cooperative work with the federal government and Telstra to maximise funding for the elimination of mobile phone black spots. The mobile phone network is a vital piece of infrastructure for the 21st century. The mobile phone is ubiquitous these days. Mobile phone black spots are not merely an inconvenience, they are a safety risk. In times of bushfire the mobile phone is an important source of real-time information in a hazardous and rapidly changing environment. The 109 new phone towers, worth \$86 million, will not only keep Victorians safer in times of emergency but will boost regional productivity. It is estimated that the regional economy will be boosted by \$120 million per year when another 12 000 homes experience the benefits of the new towers.

I am most pleased to say that my electorate of Western Victoria Region will be receiving 52 of the 109 towers. Tiny places such as Muntham and Pigeon Ponds will have improved reception, and the Andrews Labor government will give tourists the infrastructure they expect with the improvements at Cape Otway and Apollo Bay along the Great Ocean Road. People in at-risk bushfire areas such as Carlisle River in the Otways and the Victoria Valley will be safer with access to top-class communications infrastructure, and it is good to see that sizable regional towns such as Portland will benefit from this important addition to the state's infrastructure. I congratulate the government.

Palace Theatre

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Last week I wrote to the Minister for Planning regarding reports of more demolition works occurring inside 20–30 Bourke Street, which was originally the Palace Theatre and is now known as the Palace Metro. The

National Trust and the Save the Palace group have also written to the minister, and I pay tribute to those organisations for their ongoing efforts in this matter.

In answer to a question from the member for Melbourne in the Assembly, Ellen Sandell, the minister yesterday implied that because significant works have been undertaken inside the venue it is not worth protecting the historic interior and that the external facade is all that is important. This is not true, as I pointed out in Parliament in December 2013. The interior of the Palace Metro is impressive and unique and has always been admired. Despite alterations over the years, including the recent removal of some period features by the current owner, the interior retains its original plan form, including its famous balconies, staircases and its amphitheatre shape, which are a marker of the building's long history and social heritage and which are still intact.

In 1987 the Palace became the Metro Nightclub and was celebrated as one of the most advanced and impressive nightclubs in the world with its use of cutting-edge technology while retaining the historic ambience. On Network Ten's *Night Life* television program from the opening night of the Metro Nightclub, hosted by Molly Meldrum, comments in respect of the new nightclub included:

This is really fabulous.

And:

If this was in New York it would be the toast of the world.

Yet in Melbourne we are in danger of losing this rare, much-loved and historic venue that has chronicled part of Victoria's cultural history over more than a century because the heritage and planning mechanisms have so far failed to protect it. It is not good enough for the government to just let this happen.

Nichols Point school buildings

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I rise to congratulate one of my constituents from Northern Victoria Region, Mrs Joan Shaw, who through her community activism has succeeded in having a historic rotunda and original school building built in 1906 retained as a community asset for Nichols Point. I was contacted by Mrs Shaw, who had just celebrated her 70th birthday, to express her concerns about the need to preserve these historic buildings. The former Nichols Point Primary School had been unused for several years, was dilapidated and was exposed to vandalism.

Plans for demolition of these buildings, as well as several others in Merbein and Ouyen, prompted locals to form an action group to try to save the site. Working with my colleague the Minister for Education, James Merlino, the local council and the local community I am proud to say we have acted to protect these important local buildings. Mrs Shaw, her community and the local council are to be congratulated on collaborating to reassess these structures and ensure that those with historic value will remain community assets long into the future.

Saving the former Nichols Point Primary School demonstrates how the Andrews Labor government listens to and works with local communities in seeking sustainable solutions for the benefit of those communities.

Serendib Awards

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — On Friday, 2 October, I had the pleasure of joining Victoria's Sri Lankan community for the Serendib Awards gala evening. This event celebrates community nominees who have made significant contributions to the Victorian community across business, professional, media, youth, women's affairs and other categories.

I would like to congratulate all winners, but I would particularly like to mention two from Shepparton: Sam Atukorala, who won the silver award for community, and Azem Elmaz, who won the gold award for the editor's choice. Both Sam and Azem are highly regarded in Shepparton for the work they do in our community.

St Georges Road Food Festival

Ms LOVELL — On 27 September I attended the St Georges Road Food Festival in Shepparton. The strip shopping centre traders in St Georges Road represent a range of cultures, and this event gives the wider community the opportunity to celebrate our multiculturalism. It was the second year the festival has been held, and more than 2000 people took the opportunity to taste foods and be entertained by music and dancing displays by people from the many cultures who call Shepparton home. I look forward to seeing the festival continue to grow into the future.

Mercy Place Shepparton

Ms LOVELL — In late September I was pleased to attend the Mercy Day afternoon celebration at Mercy Place Shepparton and present employees with

recognition of service certificates. Thank you to all aged-care workers who care for our senior citizens.

Church Street, Whittlesea

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — On Saturday, 26 September, it was my pleasure to attend a ceremony for the newly completed Church Street, Whittlesea, streetscape development. The event was hosted by the mayor of the Whittlesea Shire Council, Cr Ricky Kirkham, together with council officers. I thank Whittlesea Shire Council for a well-organised morning. As always, I was happy to talk to local residents after viewing the new streetscape.

Louis Fleyfel

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, I am delighted to congratulate Mr Louis Fleyfel, AO, on his recent investiture into the knighthood of the Papal Order of St Gregory the Great. This is a singular honour bestowed on Louis by the Holy Father in Rome for his continuing good works and benevolence in both the church and the wider Victorian community. Louis has made his family and the entire Australian Lebanese community proud. I know that Louis is not a person who seeks recognition or awards for his charitable works, but in my opinion he is a very worthy recipient.

Our Lady of Lebanon, Thornbury

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, on Sunday, 27 September, I attended Our Lady of Lebanon church in Thornbury. A mass had been organised by the Lebanese forces to commemorate the souls and martyrs of the Lebanese resistance. This annual solemn occasion was very well attended and gave us all cause to reflect on the suffering and sacrifice of Lebanese men and women who have paid the ultimate price for freedom.

Minister for Agriculture

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Last weekend was certainly very interesting, starting on Friday morning with an amazing initiative by the Victorian Governor, Linda Dessau, who hosted around 600 community football volunteers at Government House. With the AFL chairman, Mike Fitzpatrick, and CEO, Gillon McLachlan, along with the Premier, the Governor was able to thank those in Victoria who had been put forward by their clubs as hero volunteers. It was an amazing event.

However, what really astounded me about the weekend was the tweet that came out of the Minister for Agriculture's office saying how delighted she was

about the beautiful weather across western Victoria and the seven-day forecast. While tens of thousands of farmers across Victoria are facing a season of ruined crops due to a lack of spring rain, the only explanation anyone could draw from the minister's comments is that either she is too dumb to realise that being so delighted about a dry seven-day forecast would absolutely gut the farming industry she leads, or she knew her comments would seriously upset the agricultural industry and she simply did not care.

In prioritising sticking up for her embattled Premier, who was taking an absolute belting for his brain fade of creating a state with more public holidays than any other, the Minister for Agriculture thought it would be a real winner for her to tell the world that she was dancing in the sun and basking in the dry weather while her entire agricultural sector was dealing with one of the driest finishes to a cropping season for many years.

Labor has a track record of putting ministers into the agriculture portfolio who have no idea about their portfolio, such as a former member for Bendigo West in the Assembly, Bob Cameron, who was a nice guy but a lawyer; a former member for Ripon in the Assembly, Joe Helper, a nice guy but a mechanic; the Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford, a nice lady but a union organiser. Total disrespect — —

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

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Reporting date

Message received from Assembly informing Council that they have agreed to following resolution:

That the resolution of the house of 18 August 2015 be amended to extend the reporting date for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into allegations made against the Auditor-General no later than 10 November 2015.

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

That:

- (a) the resolution of the house of 18 August 2015 be amended to extend the reporting date for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into allegations made against the Auditor-General no later than 10 November 2015; and
- (b) a message will be sent to the Assembly acquainting them of the Council's resolution.

Motion agreed to.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That in accordance with standing order 11.01, there be tabled in the Council, by 12 noon on Wednesday, 11 November 2015, a copy of all documents created on or after 4 December 2014, or used to inform departmental decisions or ministerial briefings on or after 4 December 2014, in relation to the City of Port Phillip draft planning scheme amendment C107, including but not limited to —

- (1) all correspondence to/from the Department of Economy, Jobs, Transport and Resources and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning;
- (2) all correspondence to/from the Minister for Planning, the Honourable Richard Wynne, MP, dealing with amendment C107; and
- (3) an extract copy of the Minister for Planning's diary identifying meetings held or attended in relation to amendment C107.

I note that the date for production has been amended due to the standing order.

This is a strip of land that begins at Dorcas Street and runs south. It has Queens Road on one boundary and St Kilda Road on the other. It crosses over to the north of Albert Park Lake area. It is a significant area for development. There is already significant and intense development there. The government convened a panel. The panel recommended virtually unrestrained development. The City of Port Phillip has undertaken a process which has resulted in the draft planning scheme amendment C107. There has been significant community input, both from local residents and from the council area more generally. It is a useful addition to the approach to this area.

There are significant issues if you are going to have intense development, and this is an area where significant development can occur, but it needs to be structured in the right way. You need to ensure that traffic plans are undertaken in a way that results in sensible traffic movements. At the same time you need to make sure that the visual amenity is protected and that the facilities that need to be in place are in place. It is not sufficient just to point to some of the large parks nearby. In my view there also need to be better plans for smaller open spaces in and around the area.

There need to be public spaces in those areas that support the longer term amenity of the area. There is a significant planning challenge here to do more intense development but to do it in a careful way that results in an outcome which is to the long-term benefit of the community. I have talked to many people in that area. I have talked to a number of the building groups and

people from some of the towers in the area, and there is significant concern about how the government intends to go about this process. It is important and in the public interest to have these documents. They will inform the chamber and the community of the process that the department and the minister are going through and the weight and approach they are putting on the contribution of the City of Port Phillip.

It is also important to understand the differences that relate to the C107 planning scheme amendment and its claim for mandatory height limits and the proposals for discretionary arrangements. These issues need to be dealt with in a way that ultimately benefits the community in the precinct. Planning in this area has to give a long-term benefit. North of Dorcas Street and into the city we have seen the Minister for Planning slap on a series of controls in what can only be described as a chaotic approach to that issue. People have different views about that, but the one thing that is clear is that it has created absolute pandemonium in the planning industry and in the development industry.

We have the opportunity to get this right, and these documents will inform the understanding of the chamber, local members and the community of the processes of the department and the minister and the weight that is accorded to these different inputs. It is important also to see what influences the minister and to understand his approach to this set of decisions.

I compliment the council on the steps it has taken and on its involvement of the community. I have walked around a large part of this area and looked at many of the different problems that are going to have to be confronted during this process. There is also a plan to put part of the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel underneath the area. The briefing held in South Yarra last week did not inform us about the exact location of the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel. It is clear that this is still in flux, there is still some level of confusion, and there are indicative sitings on some of these so-called maps at the moment.

Again I pay tribute to the local community in the planned zone bounded by the C107 draft planning scheme amendment. These documents are very much in the public interest, and I seek the chamber's support for that reason.

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Mr Davis's motion. In and of itself the motion is nothing new or even outstanding, no doubt much to Mr Davis's chagrin. The City of Port Phillip has undertaken a process, one that Mr Davis was keen to support and publicly advocate for, and surprisingly

he believed it was a good process. I say 'surprisingly' because Mr Davis is not known for giving praise to people of different political persuasions to his own, so I accept in good faith the kind words that he has had to say about the City of Port Phillip.

In effect this motion is trying to circumvent or cut short a process of government that is underway right now. It seeks the tabling by 11 November of documents that have been created since we came to government in relation to City of Port Phillip planning scheme amendment C107. Paragraph 1 deals directly with correspondence to and from the department. Paragraph 2 specifies correspondence to and from the Minister for Planning, the Honourable Richard Wynne. I presume it also seeks to cover correspondence to and from the acting minister, given that Mr Wynne has had some leave for health reasons. Perhaps Mr Davis would like to move an amendment to the motion. We have nothing to hide, and there are no issues of transparency, so there is no reason why I should not draw Mr Davis's attention to what may be a glaring omission in his motion.

Paragraph 3 asks for the release of an extract copy of the minister's diary. I find this quite extraordinary. The previous government, in which Mr Davis was the failed Minister for Health, was never prepared to release the diaries of any of its ministers. It also fought to protect the diary of the then chief of staff to the Premier — or that is my recollection, and I am happy to be corrected by those opposite. Not having been a member of the last Parliament, I am speaking as a member of society.

Mr Davis and the opposition have form on attempting to procure documents or interrupt processes against the best interests of the community, although they refused to comply with such requests while in government. This is a very important point to make. We have seen a multitude of notices of motion from the opposition attempting to usurp the role of government, to limit its ability to move and to stop it from working in the best interests of citizens. They have sought the release of confidential information and contracts with third parties. They have attempted to pervert the ordinary course of government business.

I will use the example of a motion seeking the release of contracts relating to the grand prix. When in government, the opposition refused to release contracts related to the grand prix, because it appreciated that to do so would raise commercial-in-confidence issues. That did not stop it coming into this place and grandstanding on this somewhat ironic request. It was an example of the gross hypocrisy of those opposite, which we again see as they attempt to misuse the

processes of this place to solicit the release of documents relating to a very pure process being undertaken right now.

As Mr Davis has indicated, the planning scheme amendment that is the subject of this motion was prepared by the City of Port Phillip in relation to the *Draft St Kilda Road North Precinct Plan 2013* — C107, as Mr Davis correctly identified. As I understand it, the process began late last year just before the government went into caretaker mode.

At a meeting on 28 October 2014 the council considered submissions received during the exhibition period and resolved to refer amendment C107 and the submissions to an independent planning panel. I do not intend to take the chamber through all the steps in that process. It is suffice to say that after receiving the panel report and releasing it in late May this year, the council considered the report and resolved to adopt the amendment, with changes, at a meeting at the end of July. The council also adopted the *St Kilda Road North Precinct Plan*, which provided the strategic basis for this amendment. Following the adoption of the amendment, the council received a significant number of letters both in support and in opposition to it. These have been sent to the Minister for Planning. On 15 September this year amendment C107 was submitted to the Minister for Planning with a request for approval.

Mr Davis put this motion forward but has seen fit to talk through the government's response. Should he choose to listen, let me elucidate for his benefit some information that he would otherwise have mistakenly disregarded: 15 September was three and a bit weeks ago. Mr Davis is asking for documentation that has only been with the government for three and a bit weeks. When I say 'with the government', that requires a fair degree of thought and consideration in relation to the amendment. As I understand it, that amendment is currently under active consideration, as you would expect after only some three and a half weeks; you would expect that consideration of three and a half weeks to be the very beginning of the process.

This is not an example of the government dragging its chain or slowing down a process — not at all. We are conscientiously working through the request by the City of Port Phillip for the Minister for Planning to review and approve the decision. This request for support and approval was lodged three and a bit weeks ago. I find it a little galling that Mr Davis would stand up and grandstand in this place and abuse the process of this chamber for something the government was asked to review just three weeks ago. I find the fact that the

opposition is asking for letters and correspondence, documentation and diaries in relation to a matter that has just been referred to this government — we did not call it in; it was referred to us by the City of Port Phillip — quite frankly an abuse of process in this chamber.

It is somewhat disappointing that Mr Davis, having been a minister in this place, would try to use the processes of the Parliament for his own private political gain. He is usurping the role of good public policy development — good public policy purview — and ongoing good public policy decision-making.

I do not understand what Mr Davis is trying to do. Given that the department has had this application for just three and a half weeks, I do not understand why Mr Davis has all of a sudden decided that this is an issue for which he should be demanding documents. As I said, the requested documents include correspondence to and from the department, correspondence to and from the minister and an extract of the minister's diary identifying meetings held or attended in relation to this amendment. To make matters worse, notice of this motion was provided on 18 August. I would have thought, given that the City of Port Phillip proactively sought the minister's support of amendment C107, which was then submitted on 15 September, that Mr Davis would have allowed this notice to lie on the notice paper for a period to allow the government sufficient time to undertake the business of government, which is to respond to the requests of the community — in this case, a municipal council request.

The business of government is to respond to people's requests. In this case the request is from a municipality — of which I was a resident for a great deal of my life, although not at the moment — to the Minister for Planning to request approval of amendment C107 after the City of Port Phillip undertook a lengthy and consultative process with the residents and the commercial businesses of the St Kilda Road north precinct in particular, which takes in a great deal of both residential and commercial office space. It is an important precinct of the City of Melbourne and is in my own electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region.

I find it quite appalling that David Davis would continue on with such a motion when in previous debates in this place Mr Davis has acknowledged that with him as the shadow minister the Minister for Planning has acted in good faith on a range of activities, including legislation that has come through this chamber. From what I perceive, they have a positive working relationship, yet for some reason Mr Davis appears to want to use the process of this place to

procure information that at this point has no public policy importance and no position of public policy strength. It is nothing other than an attempt to engender some kind of Liberal Party political hack attack on both the Labor and the Green members of the City of Port Phillip, who have done nothing more than undertake the order of good governance by reviewing a policy and then, at the end of that review, putting that policy forward, some three weeks ago, to the Minister for Planning for his approval of the amendment which they are attempting to push forward.

This motion should not be agreed to. It is premature to go forward, given the delicate public policy position in which the minister has been requested by the municipality to support its amendment application. This process is alive, and therefore releasing any information would be the antithesis of good public policy. If we cannot necessarily agree on the outcomes of all decisions, we should try to agree on the policy purity of the decision-making process. This is at the beginning of this decision-making process. It is neither at the middle of the process nor at the end; it is at the beginning. We are three weeks into the application for support of this process.

The department has begun to diligently work through that request from the City of Port Phillip, and the Minister for Planning deserves an appropriate time frame for his department to go through that application and look at its merits without the fear that the release of any communication and/or diary entries or otherwise would somehow bring that policy process into question. I know this is a big request, but I simply ask those opposite to think about applying the same rules and standards that they applied to themselves in government to this government, as it goes about the business of governing for all Victorians.

I remind Mr Davis in particular, who still refuses to listen to the position that the government has put, that he is a member for Southern Metropolitan Region as well. I remind Mr Davis that whilst members across both chambers may at times have views about the work of municipal councils, they are nevertheless a third tier of government within our Westminster system. Those councillors were elected and they have undertaken their own process in relation to this amendment scheme, which was finalised by their putting forward an application to the minister to support the work that they did as that third tier of government. Mr Davis should bear that in mind and be respectful of that process because, just as we were elected, those councillors were also elected and they have undertaken a process in which they wish the Minister for Planning to support a decision that they reviewed and implemented.

I ask those opposite, including the members of the crossbench and the Greens, to support that process and reject the motion before us, because it interferes with the request that the City of Port Phillip has made of the minister to support the amendment in relation to which the council has undertaken a rigorous review and arrived at a determination. I finish by saying that the house should reject Mr Davis's motion because it unfairly interferes with the due process that is already in place and underway.

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion put before the house by Mr Davis. It is purely and simply a documents motion. It asks for correspondence from the department, correspondence from the Minister for Planning and any extract copies of the diary of the Minister for Planning in relation to planning scheme amendment C107 of the City of Port Phillip.

C107 is an incredibly important planning scheme amendment, because it looks towards an important boulevard for Melbourne and for Victoria, St Kilda Road, which has a view we all know and love — that of the Shrine of Remembrance and the beautiful parklands surrounding the shrine. It is an important part of Melbourne, and a lot of precision and detail is required in the work of protecting that boulevard and the landscape qualities of the areas around it.

In terms of the planning scheme amendment, council has gone through a rigorous consultation process with its community. I commend the City of Port Phillip for working with its community to come up with a vision of what is really important for its city. Amendment C107 takes in a number of precincts of the city, but in relation to this matter I am going to talk only about the St Kilda Road north precinct. Sam Hibbins, the member for Prahran in the other place, has informed me that what has raised the ire of communities locally is the panel's recommendation of not setting mandatory height limits.

It would seem that height limits is a core issue in relation to C107. The vision for the area that council has proposed and the community has embraced is that the precinct of St Kilda Road north be a dynamic and open locality. Through consultation, council has realised that the pressure is on in its municipality in terms of providing for the demand in residential development. It has suggested a change to its planning scheme that can accommodate residential apartments and higher density residential development.

What is really significant in terms of council's vision for this particular area is that it wants to ensure that

there is a high-quality, well-landscaped public realm that supports convenient access to nearby park services and sustainable transport modes. Council and the community recognise the importance of St Kilda Road maintaining its role as a world-famous boulevard and of the Shrine of Remembrance maintaining its prominence and landmark quality. I am sure that all of us in this chamber would agree that that is a fine community vision and aspiration. Part of achieving that is council's ability to set mandatory height controls.

It is very important to local communities that their planning schemes have certainty in them, because certainty relieves a lot of angst around future planning applications and future development. Clearly this is not only of concern to the people of the City of Port Phillip, it is also of concern to the broader community, because this is such an important vista for Melbourne and Victoria.

What council has suggested shows that it supports this strategic direction. Coming back to the motion, which truly seeks out documents, the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Mr Dalidakis, is right in suggesting that the formal request to approve C107 has been with the government for only a very short period of time. However, that does not mean that there have not been correspondence or meetings with the department or the minister in the interim period. It would not be the first time in the history of planning ministers that there were meetings and correspondence between local councils and the department in the period following a formal request for approval of a planning scheme amendment.

In the interests of open and transparent government the Greens will support this motion. We are always interested to see the mechanics of government. Whether we get these documents is another thing, and I note that although the diary entry may seem like an extraordinary request, I do not think it is extraordinary.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Ms DUNN — I think it is a reasonable request. Like Minister Dalidakis, I have not been a member of any prior government, so I can only take it at face value that those sorts of documents have never, ever been presented in the past. There is a certain amount of irony in the opposition asking for those documents. Perhaps Labor could be a model of open and transparent government in providing them. It could lead the charge in terms of openness and transparency by revealing what documentation is available in relation to this planning scheme amendment.

Too often in the past we have seen planning ministers override local government, which makes significant efforts and incurs significant costs in preparing planning scheme amendments. It is a very long process. If it is done well — and I believe council's process in relation to creating this amendment has been done very well — council undertakes a very long conversation with members of its community about their aspirations and vision for the place they call home. C107 certainly represents that.

I know in relation to the submissions that form part of the amendment process the council referred the matter to a planning panel, and the panel has come back with some recommendations that are not supported by council. The council has every right not to support the panel's recommendations. It has every right to be the representative of its community and to seek to embed in its planning schemes the things that matter to its community. The way amendment C107 sits at the moment is in fact a representation of what the council's community desires.

I would hate to think that this government would carry out ministerial intervention that overrides the autonomy of local government in relation to planning scheme amendments, particularly where there has been an excellent process attached. I would hope this government would be respectful of the process and would authorise this planning scheme amendment to proceed as is to allow certainty for that community and that council in relation to mandatory height limits and certainty into the future about what is important for St Kilda Road.

As I have said, we will most certainly be supporting the motion. It relates to open and transparent — —

Mr Dalidakis — Most certainly — interfering in a process you support.

Ms DUNN — To take up the interjection through you, Acting President, the Greens support open and transparent government. Documents production motions put before this house support open and transparent government. I would hope the Minister for Planning has not interfered. I would hope there would be nothing to see here, because the minister should not be interfering in the planning process. There should be respect for the autonomy of local government in these matters. If the local government rejects some of the planning panel recommendations, then so be it. I would hope the government sets the benchmark and releases the documents and we see that there has been no ministerial intervention. Local governments are sick to

death of ministers interfering time and again in what is the work of local councils.

We will therefore be supporting this documents request motion. Let us hope we do not see the minister coming in and overriding the aspirations and the desires of not only the City of Port Phillip councillors but also the community they represent.

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — I want to make a few brief comments before the proposer of the motion sums up. I will start by saying that I agree with many of the observations made earlier. I agree with the observation that I think all previous speakers on this motion have made, that this is a very important and complex issue and that the boulevard and the area of the city we are talking about are incredibly important as part of a commercial and residential precinct. There is of course also the precinct's interaction with the shrine and other parts of the city more generally. There are therefore very important issues at stake — we all agree on that — and very widely varied interests at stake, which is reflected in the large number of organisations and individuals that have taken part in the City of Port Phillip's process to date.

In referring to the motion, I reiterate some of the points made by Mr Dalidakis earlier. What troubles me — and this reflects also Mr Dalidakis's comments on this motion — is not so much the broader concept of transparency per se, because of course there is no problem with transparency on this side, but rather that this motion is just so broad that it looks like a politically inspired fishing expedition. It basically calls for all and every document of a very broadly described nature without any concern for potential sensitivities or for potential procedural issues, such as cabinet-in-confidence or commercial considerations, and includes a broad request for extracts from the minister's diary. That last element, as Mr Dalidakis observed, is a request of the type with which previous governments have not complied. It seems as though this motion is crafted in such a way as not really to be about transparency but to be a bit of a political stunt. That is the first point I would make — that the motion is framed in such a broad and all-encompassing way that it looks like a stunt rather than a motion representing a desire to truly look at important aspects of this issue.

The second point I would make, one that again has already been made, relates to the timing of the motion. An incredibly detailed, important and thorough process has been undertaken by the City of Port Phillip over many months, and the minister has had the result of this process for a matter of several weeks. Now, in the middle of the minister's consideration, an extremely

broad documents request motion, which includes a request for extracts from his diary, is put before this place. In addition to the fact that it looks like a fishing expedition, it has very strange timing.

I will agree with everybody who has spoken on this motion so far that amendment C107 is very important, but even though the motion relates to an important issue, it is framed in such a way as to raise one's suspicions that it is motivated by something more than the desire for transparency. It is motivated by more than pure policy considerations.

To reinforce the point that this is an incredibly important issue it is worth observing that the planning issues that are brought to the fore by this motion are very complicated. They relate to building heights, as Ms Dunn observed. They relate to visual amenity, something to which Mr Davis alluded. They relate to issues of density and issues to do with the size of apartments, something which has been a broader policy consideration across the city as a whole and which is a complex issue. The planning issues the motion brings to the fore include more general issues of infrastructure, including public transport infrastructure, traffic management and parking. We therefore have all these very complicated issues involved.

The complexity of this planning deliberation is in fact what has warranted the City of Port Phillip undertaking the extensive and complex consultation process that it has undertaken. What process has been undertaken? I will not go through all the steps, but I think it is worth observing that this goes back some way. If we go back to October 2014, the City of Port Phillip considered submissions received during an exhibition period and then resolved to refer amendment C107 to an independent planning panel. This independent planning panel itself undertook extensive consultation. The panel hearing began on Monday, 8 December 2014, at St Kilda town hall and concluded on Thursday, 5 March. There were 228 submissions received, many of them highly detailed, from a highly varied range of sources. This has been an incredibly extensive process. The number, range and complexity of submissions reflects the complexity of the issue, as I alluded to earlier.

The council received the report of the independent planning panel on 6 May and released it on 19 May. It considered the report over some period of time — roughly a couple of months. Then on 28 July the council adopted the *St Kilda Road North Precinct Plan*, which provides the strategic basis for the amendment. It accepted some of the panel's recommendations but maintained other controls.

A whole range of policy trade-offs were at stake. One of them — one of many — was the extent to which height controls are mandatory versus discretionary, and whether mandatory or discretionary height controls should apply across the whole precinct or whether they should just apply in certain subprecincts. Council worked through the detailed panel report, which had taken some months to complete.

Of course the amendment has now arrived at the office of the Minister for Planning. As Minister Dalidakis pointed out, what we have here is a very important and staged process: the council undertook consideration and then decided to put this issue to an independent planning panel; that panel undertook consultation with a wide range of stakeholders — over 200 — and then the council considered that report. What we are seeing is a process where each step needs to be taken carefully, and I think it would fly in the face of taking this process seriously if a mere handful of weeks after the Minister for Planning started deliberations there was a wholesale dumping of documents, including extracts from the minister's diary, onto the public record in such a way that would imperil the serious consideration of this issue.

That ultimately is what must drive this process. Allowing the minister to make the most appropriate decision in the public interest must be the outcome here. Ms Dunn has indicated her preference that the minister not intervene in something that she considers to be within the purview of local government. I understand that local governments have on occasions felt frustrated when ministers have stepped in. I personally do not have such a one-size-fits-all view on that issue; I believe ministers should be very careful when stepping in, but I do believe on occasions it can be justified. Certainly what I would not want to see in this instance is for the minister in deciding whether to take one course of action or another to have that decision interrupted by some wholesale fishing expedition or disclosure distraction. That is really what this would be if the minister were to spend time working out which parts of his diary to put on the public record.

It is very difficult to understand how such a wholesale fishing exercise could assist in that decision-making being a sensible process. I totally agree with Ms Dunn that there are a range of issues that are prima facie within the purview of local government, and there are trade-offs when state governments intervene in that bailiwick. But it does not help governments make these decisions if in the middle of that process they are having to deal with the distraction of these kinds of motions.

What I would say is let this process play its course. It is not going to take an inordinate amount of time. It is going to take an appropriate amount of time given the complexity of the issues at stake. As everybody who has spoken on this motion has indicated, these are incredibly important issues and incredibly complex issues. Let us let the process play out, and then let us see what kinds of disclosure are appropriate in light of the decision that is made.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — Very briefly, in reply, I thank those who have made contributions. In particular I thank Ms Dunn for the contribution she made to this debate. I want to put on record again my thanks to the Port Phillip City Council for the work it has done with its draft planning scheme amendment, noting particularly the work of Cr Andrew Bond. I note also that this motion is about transparency. It is firmly within the powers of this chamber to request these documents, and I believe very strongly that this is in the public interest.

It is the case that the council has formally sent these documents to the government in recent weeks, but equally it is true that there is a very long process behind this — work that has gone on, public consultation processes. I pay tribute to those building secretaries or presidents of associations inside the buildings who have sought to put the case of their residents into the public domain in a constructive way through the council's amendment C107 process.

There is no question that these points and the work that has gone into this at departmental and council level is important. The public has a right to know what information has been presented in departmental decisions and ministerial briefings to whoever the Minister for Planning might have been at particular points. It is clear that the Honourable Richard Wynne, the Minister for Planning, will make the decision on this planning scheme amendment, and it is in the public interest to understand the background to that decision.

Motion agreed to.

WARRNAMBOOL–GEELONG RAIL SERVICES

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) condemns the Andrews government for not supporting an additional daily rail service on the Warrnambool to Geelong line;
- (2) notes the Geelong to Melbourne peak rail services are overcrowded, unreliable and suffer regular delays;

- (3) notes the many complaints made to the regional network community forums; and
- (4) calls on the Andrews government to make the necessary changes and introduce a fourth daily service to meet the needs of train passengers using the Warrnambool line.

It gives me great pleasure to speak to the four parts of the motion, and I will deal with each part separately. The first part condemns the Andrews Labor government for not supporting an additional daily rail service on the Warrnambool to Geelong line, and I wish to make some introductory remarks in relation to this additional service.

Currently there are three rail services between Warrnambool and Geelong and then on to Southern Cross. For many years G21, which is a collective group of municipal councils along that rail track, has been advocating for five rail services per day to accommodate the flexibility of timetables that would allow residents as far away as Portland, near the South Australian border, to meet their work and living commitments in and around Melbourne but also facilitate their sporting commitments on the weekend and in both cases allow them to return home at a reasonable hour.

I congratulate the work that G21 has done in advocating for the additional service, as well as the municipalities of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast, Colac Otway, Corangamite, Warrnambool and Glenelg. I congratulate in particular the work done by the previous Minister for Public Transport, Terry Mulder, in establishing a number of investments around the rail services from Geelong to the south-west coast, and in particular the work he did in bringing the regional rail link to fruition, well before the scheduled time and well under budget. The coalition took over the project from Labor and found that inappropriate budgetary allocations had been made for signals, there were problems in relation to some of the track work and there had been no forward advanced manufacturing of carriages, and it is a credit to former minister Terry Mulder that he was able to pull the project back into shape and deliver it well before time and well under budget.

That regional rail link has provided country Victoria with a dedicated track, particularly from Geelong and Ballarat to Southern Cross station, and it is part of a larger scheme to provide a rail network right across regional Victoria. The construction of the \$25.9 million Waurn Ponds railway station was an important linkage to the service to south-west Victoria, as was the \$10 million passing loop and the creation of the extra capacity for parking at Marshall railway station, and as we know the passing loop at Birregurra has been

instrumental in having this fourth additional rail service to the south-west coast.

Mr Barber — Where is it?

Mr RAMSAY — I am getting to that, Mr Barber; don't hurry me. Given the strong advocacy by our Liberal and Nationals candidates in the Assembly electorates of Polwarth and South-West Coast — Richard Riordon and Roma Britnell down in the south-west, and David O'Brien in Polwarth and Mike Neoh in the south-west for The Nationals — only last week our Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Matthew Guy, announced that when in government the coalition would support an additional fourth daily rail service to the south-west. I congratulate those candidates for their advocacy in getting a commitment from the coalition for the fourth service.

At the same time I emphasise the importance of the rail network for regional Victoria because it really is the lifeblood of the area to connect regional Victoria with metropolitan Melbourne. It is part of an important process to encourage decentralisation — moving high populations within the city out into country areas and creating an environment where there are opportunities for business, industry, tourism, housing and of course the creation of more jobs. Therefore there is an urgent need to have a good rail service and road connection.

I congratulate the former Minister for Roads, Terry Mulder, and his federal counterparts for supporting and committing to the upgrade of the Princes Highway west, which currently provides duplication between Geelong and Winchelsea and then to Colac and further on to Warrnambool. That road connection is very important for those in regional Victoria to travel in a timely and safe manner to our metropolitan cities. So the road linkage is very important for country Victoria, but so is rail, and there is wide support for the additional daily rail service.

The coalition government prior to the last election committed to ongoing daily services between Geelong and Melbourne, and again flexibility in the timetable is important in those connections between the south-west and Geelong and then to Melbourne. The service runs daily every 20 minutes from Geelong to Melbourne, and that has been welcomed by those in the south-west region. Therefore it beggars belief that out of all of those stakeholders I have mentioned it is the Andrews Labor government that is not committing to the additional fourth daily rail service between Warrnambool and Geelong. Even the federal candidate for Corangamite, Libby Coker, is not supporting the additional rail service. For whatever reason Labor

seems to be stuck on the fact that it will not invest in an additional daily service from Warrnambool. I cannot understand why, because I am sure Labor would not want to be seen as treating those who live in the south-west as second-class citizens.

People who live in the south-west have every right to expect timely and efficient rail access to our cities. There should be enough flexibility in the rail timetables to allow them to get to work on time, to come home from work in a reasonable time, to go to sporting events and to make appointments. They need to know that the reliability, punctuality and flexibility of timetables will allow them to go about their business, as do their metropolitan cousins. I am quite dumbfounded with the government's decision, given that all the stakeholders I have mentioned, whether it is the councils, the political parties, the Greens, the coalition, the businesses along the corridors, are all supporting the additional rail service. The Labor Party is the exception.

I also mention the fact that since the launch of the regional rail link, the Geelong–Melbourne link, which the Warrnambool line joins, has suffered significant problems with overcrowding and unreliability. It is disappointing to see once again that the Labor government has not provided the necessary rolling stock to cater for the introduction of the regional rail link and is still having problems in providing sufficient carriages for those peak services. I am sure my colleague Mr Morris will mention the problems associated with the Ballarat line, which he has done on many occasions in this chamber. The problem, as I understand it, has still not been resolved. I will leave it to Mr Morris to go into more detail on that.

I can assure the house that as a regular train traveller from Geelong to Melbourne I often stand because I cannot find a seat. I find the connections are hard to organise because invariably the services are running late and the urban services are not connected — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr RAMSAY — I can tell Ms Pulford that I do not blush, no matter what members might think over on that side of the house.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — I am sure the Acting President will call Ms Shing to order when he sees fit.

Paragraph (2) of this motion:

notes the Geelong to Melbourne peak rail services are overcrowded, unreliable and suffer regular delays.

This was borne out at a meeting I attended in Colac with Richard Riordan, the Liberal candidate for the Assembly seat of Polwarth, only the other day. That meeting was attended by 80 people. It was a meeting with Public Transport Victoria (PTV) and clearly indicated that people are very unhappy with the change in timetables. They are very unhappy that they do not have an additional rail service to Warrnambool, given that the previous Minister for Public Transport, Terry Mulder, built the passing loop just outside Birregurra near Warncoort to allow that full service to happen without delay. The bus routes associated with the areas around the south-west and the Greater Geelong region were also raised. We still have those problems, and Labor has not yet responded to them.

Paragraph (3) of the motion:

notes the many complaints made to the regional network community forums.

I know my colleague Mr Morris has attended a number of those community forums. Andrew Katos, the member for South Barwon in the other house, and I attended the Colac and Geelong PTV meetings. There is still ongoing dissatisfaction with rail services right across regional Victoria, particularly in the south-west in relation to the issues I have referred to.

The unfortunate thing is that the regional network community forums are about looking at potential new services that would be provided as the population grows out in the regional areas. However, at the forums I attended most of the time was spent trying to respond to the new rail and bus service timetables introduced by the government in July, and there is a lot of angst out there in the community over the current timetables and the disconnections they are causing. A lot of community anger was expressed at the PTV meetings I attended, so much so that Andrew Katos and I held our own community meetings and forums so that the people using those services could provide us with information on their concerns with the services. Our forums gave people using the services the opportunity to outline what they would like the timetables to provide. I am not talking about 20 or 30 responses; we have received hundreds of responses. Hundreds of users of the services came out on cold windy nights to attend those meetings and tell us their concerns and their frustration at the introduction of the new timetables for bus and rail services.

Paragraph (4) of the motion:

calls on the Andrews government to make the necessary changes and introduce a fourth daily service to meet the needs of train passengers using the Warrnambool line.

I have reflected on the fact that there seems to be only one group that is refusing to commit to a fourth daily service, and that is the Labor Party. For reasons best known to themselves they are not listening to the concerns of the communities in the south-west. Perhaps Ms Shing might like to take the train from Southern Cross station to Warrnambool through Geelong so that she can hear for herself the concerns of communities along the rail route who cannot, due to the inflexibility of the timetables and the lack of that additional service, get to Melbourne by 9.00 a.m. They are not able to get to sporting events on the weekends because there is no flexibility in the timetables. They are not able to get home from work at a reasonable hour. Many of them are travelling back at midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning because of the lack of services from Melbourne to Warrnambool. As Ms Shing would know, Portland is an hour and a half further from Warrnambool and the coach connections do not provide any flexibility.

It is disappointing that the Labor government is refusing to support a fourth daily rail service to Warrnambool, given that just about every council, the G21 Geelong Regional Alliance and community members right across the rail network are screaming out for this additional service.

While I am on my feet I will make a few remarks around the work the previous government did in relation to providing additional weekday train services from Warrnambool to Melbourne, and I particularly note the services departing at 6.08 a.m., 12.08 p.m. and 5.50 p.m. I also note the services from Melbourne to Warrnambool departing at 7.20 a.m., 1.21 p.m. and 7.12 p.m. The indication is that the service leaving Southern Cross station at 7.12 p.m. does not get into Warrnambool until around midnight, so there is obviously a need for greater flexibility.

The South-West Coast Liberal Party candidate, Roma Britnell, has said the extra service would enable greater flexibility for south-west train travellers making a day return trip to Melbourne. She is quoted as saying:

'It's a no-brainer — people getting to and from town (by train) is causing us no end of trouble', Mrs Britnell said. 'This extra train service will really help grow our region and reach more of our potential'.

The Polwarth Liberal Party candidate, Richard Riordan, also expressed his support for the fourth train service pledge. A fourth coach connection presently exists between Geelong and Colac in the late afternoon, but it does not provide the flexibility that a fourth daily train service would provide.

I also acknowledge the work that the federal Liberal member for Corangamite, Sarah Henderson, is doing in relation to seeking funding for the duplication of the track from Geelong to Marshall.

Ms Patten — Getting in the good books, are you?

Mr RAMSAY — Don't you worry about that, Ms Patten. This is particularly important because, as members know, there is a tunnel that is creating a delay in the provision of extra services. If we duplicate the track from South Geelong to Waurin Ponds, that will provide greater service capacity. I congratulate Ms Henderson on the work she is doing and our state members on seeking support for funding of that duplication, which is supported by the Public Transport Users Association.

In summary, this is an important motion for those living in the south-west. I congratulate our Liberal and Nationals candidates in the electorates of South-West Coast and Polwarth on their advocacy for this important investment in an additional daily rail service on the Warrnambool–Geelong line. I congratulate the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Matthew Guy, and the shadow Minister for Public Transport, David Hodgett, the member for Croydon in the Assembly, on making the announcement last Wednesday in Warrnambool, and again in Colac, of our commitment to and support for introducing a fourth daily service. I look forward to ongoing work to provide a fifth service in future, when population shifts are such that a fifth service is feasible. On that basis I am happy to support this motion.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — There was only one thing missing from Mr Ramsay's contribution, and that is 'Authorised by S. Frost, 104 Exhibition Street, Melbourne'. That was a magnificent bit of electioneering and campaign propaganda, and I hope The Nationals, the Greens and other parties with endorsed candidates in the by-elections will be offered a right of reply, after what was some shameless campaigning on the Parliament's clock by Mr Ramsay.

Ms Shing — Does that pass the pub test?

Ms PULFORD — Speaking of things that may or may not pass the pub test, I hope Mr Ramsay did not have any assistance from his electorate officers in preparing those comments or organising any of his visits to the by-election electorates.

I will respond to a couple of things Mr Ramsay said. Mr Ramsay said the Labor Party is the only entity in the known universe not supporting this, but an extra service

on the Warrnambool line is being looked at by the government.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms PULFORD — What did you do, huh? Did you do anything? Did you do anything good for public transport in four years? You have no credibility on this stuff at all, and you know it.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! Ms Pulford! I do not mind some interjection, but to a limit. I cannot hear the minister speaking, and I do not understand a word. I ask both sides to control themselves.

Ms PULFORD — Thank you, Acting President, for your counsel. Since we were elected to government our efforts have been to deliver on each and every one of our election commitments, and excellent progress is being made to that end. In addition to that, specifically in relation to regional public transport and regional rail services, the government has been developing a regional network development plan. Around 300 people participated across the Barwon-south western region in the community and stakeholder workshops that occurred in Warrnambool, Portland, Geelong and Torquay. The people who participated in those consultations suggested a range of areas for improvement, including the frequency of services between Melbourne and Geelong, the matter that Mr Ramsay's motion refers to — an additional service for Warrnambool — how to make fares and ticketing more accessible and simpler, and also the passenger experience on V/Line trains.

It is worth noting that in four years the previous government did not deliver a single extra weekday service for Warrnambool, despite that train service running through the electorates of both the then Premier and the then Minister for Public Transport. The Liberal government did not order a single V/Line carriage for two years and did not invest in a single major public transport infrastructure project. Despite developing a long-term plan for Melbourne's rail system, including an airport rail link that we can ride in our retirement, it did not bother to create a plan for regional public transport. However, we are interested in developing a long-term plan for regional public transport. The regional network development plan is being developed, and the consultations have provided important input into that process.

Already we have invested in 21 extra V/Line carriages and increased the number of services across the

regional network by 30 per cent, in addition to the early work in developing that blueprint for regional public transport improvements over the next 20 to 30 years. Of course transport planning needs to consider changes in population, changes in demographics and changes in need over time.

I would like to take the opportunity to remind Mr Ramsay about the consequences of four years of coalition underfunding and neglect of our regional rail lines, which include speed restrictions and derailments. The former government gutted \$73 million from V/Line over three years — that is in addition to the stuff it did not do — but we are certainly getting on with reversing that damage. Our first budget — instead of doing nothing or making funding cuts to V/Line — included \$257 million for new regional rail carriages and infrastructure; funding for Bendigo metro rail; \$90 million for additional X'trapolis trains, securing very important manufacturing jobs in Ballarat; and funding for maintenance and refurbishment to extend the life of the Comeng train fleet, also important for supporting manufacturing jobs in Ballarat.

I urge members throughout the course of this debate, once they have recovered from the shock of what was an extraordinary advertisement for Liberal Party candidates in the by-elections in South-West Coast and Polwarth, to reflect on the Liberal Party's form in this area over decades and the enormous gulf between what its members say in opposition and what they do in government.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — It certainly takes guts for the Liberal Party to move this motion, and no wonder it got the leading member of the Mission: Impossible team, prodded him up here and said, 'You are going to have to come in here and somehow explain how in four years the coalition could not deliver this'. I do not think it took that long for a satellite to fly out to Pluto and take photos of its moon, but in four years the coalition could not deliver this service. The former government knew — it must have known, because V/Line told that government in 2010 — that the regional rail link would have standing room only from day one, and that is even with offering a shuttle service for what is effectively now a suburban railroad picking up expected massive growth through the suburbs around Werribee, being run with non-electrified shuttles to try to get those people into the city in the morning; never mind who might have been able to get on a Geelong train or who had made the trek all the way from Warrnambool itself.

Look at some of V/Line's latest statistics on its Geelong line data in recent months. V/Line advises customers

about the likely level of overcrowding they are going to experience on some of these trains. We are advised that the 5.52 a.m. from Marshall, with 302 seats, is likely to be at 100 per cent capacity; the 6.31 a.m. from South Geelong, 100 per cent capacity; the 6.31 a.m. from Waurm Ponds, 100 per cent capacity; the 7.14 a.m. from South Geelong, which gets passengers into the city at 8.17 a.m., so 40 minutes early for work, is at 100 per cent capacity. And so it continues for the 7.16 a.m., the 7.36 a.m. and the 7.38 a.m. services, the latter arriving at about 8.42 a.m. and likely to be at 100 per cent capacity — that is, standing room only. Yes, good on the former government for adding a few more car parks at Marshall, but guess what? They are at 100 per cent capacity too by pretty early in the morning, as I have observed when I am travelling in the other direction on the Warrnambool line.

The performance of this train line as well was nothing to boast about when the Liberals were in charge, and I will give the recent statistics on that. Going back to August 2014 — that is, when the government of which Mr Ramsay was a member had had all the time it needed to make the necessary changes on that line — the Warrnambool line, in terms of on time at destination was running on time 83.6 per cent of the time; and that is when the definition of ‘on time’ does not mean on time, because on time on V/Line means within the nearest 6 minutes or so. I thought on time meant on time, but apparently you can be 6 minutes late and still be on time, and yet on the Warrnambool line that can only be achieved 83.6 per cent of the time. In September 2014 it was 83.8 per cent; in October, 87 per cent; in November, 90 per cent; and so on and so forth, although we have seen some sort of precipitous decline in the last few months, back down to the mid-80s again. V/Line’s own benchmark is 92 per cent, but the benchmark should be 100 per cent.

In that whole four years there was not one train service added along that line. There is a bus that runs from Geelong to Colac in peak times. One bus service was added as a result of Mr Ramsay’s government’s effort, although in fact that bus only runs one way. I was quite intrigued when I noticed that on the timetable there is a bus that runs from Geelong to Colac but does not actually return. I thought to myself, ‘Is there a whole bunch of buses just piling up in Colac?’. No, because I asked the bus driver who is based in Colac, and in fact the bus runs from Colac to Geelong, not taking any passengers, not making any stops, and then it turns around and runs back to provide that afternoon peak service to get some people home at some kind of decent hour.

There have been a lot of debates in here about working hours, penalty rates and all the other things that go with that, but the fact is that if you try to commute from Colac to Geelong and back, you can be out of the house for 14 hours. No wonder everybody drives. No wonder the roads are getting hammered, and no wonder Mr Ramsay then has to come in here and plead for more road funding. His government did not do what it ought to have done when it had the chance.

In relation to rolling stock, we have the same old loco-hauled, rattly, falling-apart stuff that we have had now for decades, despite the fact that V/Line told the government back in 2010 that it would need to advance its orders for more rolling stock or simply wait for what is described as a cascade — that is, new rolling stock going onto certain lines, which releases rolling stock for other lines that then goes off to the north-east line, where the rolling stock rattles itself apart after the rail upgrade was stuffed up. Eventually, like the seventh brother of the family getting the hand-me-down jeans, Warrnambool gets some rolling stock from the very bottom end of this cascade. There was nothing to advance those priorities from Mr Ramsay’s government when it was in charge.

By the way, if we are going to be moving from loco-hauled to V/Locity trains on the Warrnambool line, we had better get something sorted out about the level crossings. We have had previous incidents in Victoria where those sorts of trains have hit large trucks because the trucks did not have very good visibility. The angle between the crossing of the road and the rail, which we can see as we go down the Princes Highway, does not improve visibility, and therefore there will be a real risk if we start putting V/Locity trains onto the system tomorrow.

Bikes on trains are a constant problem. Municipalities all down the Warrnambool line are building their bike trails and touring trails and encouraging tourists to come and have a biking weekend along various parts of the Otways, but the V/Line ticketing regulations still say that it is at the discretion of individual conductors as to whether bikes are taken on board, depending on the levels of overcrowding.

The former Minister for Tourism and Major Events, Louise Asher, launched a bicycle tourism strategy pretty early in the life of the last government, and one of the early items for delivery was to sort out the business of bikes on V/Line, but nothing happened. I checked the ticketing regulations last week. They are the same as they have always been. If you and a bunch of your mates rock up for a bike touring weekend on one of the very few services that are available to you on

the Warrnambool line — you might have a long weekend planned and you have booked all your accommodation — and the conductor says, ‘Sorry, we’re too full today. You can’t bring your bikes on. There are too many of you all coming at once’, that is a hopeless situation. In terms of getting them on replacement coaches or even regular V/Line coaches, you can forget about it; you are just not able to do it.

In terms of extra V/Line buses that might have supported and connected some of the services that Mr Ramsay is suddenly so enthusiastic about, there is nothing. There has been not one skerrick of an addition of a V/Line coach service in this region in the life of his government, despite the fact that you can run V/Line coaches for about \$5 a service kilometre. The total budget for V/Line coaches for the whole of Victoria is \$32 million, so you can imagine what you could do with a few million dollars to make sure that even the train services we have now are better connected to the surrounding towns. I looked it up on a journey planner the other day, and I realised that I could get to London quicker than I could get to Mortlake if I tried to get there via a train and bus combination.

There is something seriously wrong with the system. It is a total embarrassment to the coalition parties that they have made so little progress in this area for so long, right back to the Kennett government, which wrecked it in the first place. Eventually the public had to come back in — —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr BARBER — Here we are, Mrs Peulich, and all the cost-cutting done back then was simply passing forward future costs, and today we are looking around for the funds to deliver these extra services. In the meantime the community has paid the cost in terms of car dependency, with every family having to own one car per adult just to survive in places like Colac, Warrnambool or any of the towns along the way. If you do not have a car — if you are too young, too old, too poor or too disabled to drive yourself — you are stuck or dependent on someone else. It is as simple as that. Those are the real costs that do not make it into Mrs Peulich’s party’s balance sheet. Mrs Peulich, who has a pocket calculator where her heart ought to be, is talking about savings, which are really just moving them off the public balance sheet and back onto the citizens of these electorates. It is coming out of their pockets. Better than any tax cut that Mrs Peulich is ever likely to offer would be to run a fourth and then a fifth service along this line. There would be families down there who would be able to do with one less car, which would put hundreds of dollars back into their pockets.

It is election time and there are about to be a couple of by-elections, and all we have is this belated and recycled promise. Mr Ramsay has made the promise four or five times now. He thinks he is going to get four or five times the credit for continuing to recycle it. Recycling is a good thing, but not in relation to political promises. Mr Ramsay’s credibility is zero. Every council and mayor along the entire line is in consensus that this is their no. 1 priority issue. Mr Ramsay’s government was not able to deliver it, despite having the Premier and the Minister for Public Transport as local members for all those years. I have a bit of political advice that I can give to any community: if you have the Premier and the transport minister as your local members and you still cannot get one extra train service added, it is time to reconsider your voting choices. I think that is what we will be doing come these by-elections Mr Ramsay is so innervated about.

The coalition dropped one seat in this region at the last election. That seat should have gone to the Greens but instead went to Mr Purcell’s party. The fact remains that the voters have already indicated once to the coalition what they think about the level of service they are getting down there. It was goodbye to a former member for Western Victoria Region, David O’Brien, who is now having a second go and running for the Assembly seat of Polwarth. Maybe we will see him again in 2018 if he is not sick of having his backside kicked by both Vote 1 Local Jobs and the Greens.

The credibility factor is nil. The voters in this area know that the Greens and our local Greens representatives have been completely consistent in advocating on this issue, whereas Mr Ramsay continues to duck and weave depending on whether he is in government or opposition. First it is the passing loop, then it is the lack of rolling stock, then it is the level crossings, then, ‘We forgot the signalling that goes with the passing loop’. There is always going to be an excuse. Otherwise those opposite would have just run the train and released the timetable. Was the new timetable being drafted under Mr Ramsay’s departed government? Was there public consultation underway? Were the signalling issues being sorted out? It is a bit of a mystery. Terry Mulder assured us in the *Colac Herald* that he was working on it, but it was like heat haze on the horizon — no matter how far you walk, it is always just a bit further away. But of course in opposition Mr Mulder well and truly found his voice.

I am not going to seek to amend Mr Ramsay’s motion to point out that his government had four years and could not do this. I have pointed out that Geelong and Melbourne peak rail services are overcrowded and unreliable and suffer regular delays — they did the

whole time Mr Ramsay was in government, and that continues to this day. I certainly, though, endorse paragraph 4 of this motion, which:

calls on the Andrews government to make the necessary changes and introduce a fourth daily service to meet the needs of train passengers using the Warrnambool line.

It is incredibly important for the environment that we move people off roads and onto rail. It is incredibly important to community safety. Travel by rail is six times safer per kilometre travelled than road.

While we are at it, we could talk about the shocking state of the freight network, which is another Kennett legacy. Dr Naphine was good enough to admit that it was probably a mistake to have sold off V/Line freight when the coalition was in government previously. We have still not really recovered from that. It would also be good to see some advocacy from all parties about getting more freight on rail on the Warrnambool line. The Australian Lamb Company down at Colac is dead keen to start transporting more of its containerised lamb by rail. It adjoins the railway line and is willing to host a spur line or a loading bay on its site.

It is incredibly important for regional development that we get these extra rail services. If we do, it will become viable to live in some of these small and quite beautiful towns along the Warrnambool line and still commute to the job centres of Geelong and even Melbourne. That means people taking their pay packets back to these communities every night when they go home from work. In terms of a just outcome for the community, it is important that the significant part of the population without the ability to drive themselves are also given the freedom to move around — to visit friends or get to a doctor's appointment without it having to be an overnight trip.

These are essential aspects of livability and community life that other communities in Victoria probably take for granted, being on lines that have been a bit better looked after over the years, communities in Liberal or Labor marginal seats that are constantly being fought over. But Warrnambool is struggling for some of the most basic services. While I cannot but agree with the sentiments in the motion, the fact is that governments Labor, Liberal, Labor, Liberal and now Labor have failed to take action in this region. The community's voice is being heard louder and louder. Increasingly at the ballot box they are stating quite clearly that the old parties have failed them and they are looking to send better advocates to this Parliament than Labor and the coalition parties have so far been able to deliver.

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to make a small contribution to the debate on Mr Ramsay's motion supporting rail services into the Warrnambool region. I feel that I am probably more qualified than most to support the motion and to speak on it. Rail is one of my favourite topics. People here would have heard me raise it in my inaugural speech and many times since. I travel on the line quite often, and everything people are saying about it is true: it is crowded — people are required to stand or sit on the floor on regular occasions — and the timetable is wrong. We need the extra service and a better timetable.

But my reason for raising it is a little different to most. My reason is that western Victoria needs better rail services because it is a growing and strong agricultural area that has the potential to become even better. The issue of rail is made even worse because of our road network, which as I have said before needs something like \$220 million spent on it to bring it up to the standard of the rest of Victoria. Without having road and rail infrastructure in place — and today we are talking about the rail side of it — it is impossible to develop business in western Victoria, create jobs and make it even more successful than it is.

Western Victoria is growing its renewable energy industry. There are a number of wind farms that will be developed in that area, and this industry will continue to grow. As well as that there is strong agricultural growth, which is also going to be a significant job creator in coming years.

It is great to hear all parties across the political spectrum support this motion, and I am sure that support will continue after the by-elections. My cynical side does not suggest for even a moment that this issue has been brought to the surface because of the by-elections which are going to be held at the end of the month.

I support this motion. The train service is antiquated, with trains that are 30 years old. I regularly travel on this service. The trains need to be upgraded. The people in the region are saying, 'Give us more services and give us a better timetable'. The issue of antiquated carriages and trains is not being raised on a regular basis.

There are companies in Colac that tell us that they need a better train service to bring employees to their town. These companies need skilled workers who would potentially travel on a daily service to and from Geelong. There are many other areas that need to be considered as well.

I support the regional network community forums that have been held on the change of timetable. Reports we have received say there will be some changes made to the timetables, which will mean an improvement for those living in western Victoria.

It is important to have an additional train service to not only improve the region's infrastructure and also get people from Melbourne to western Victoria and back again. An extra service will create an opportunity for people to attend medical appointments and also attend Deakin University, which will provide many more education services to the Geelong area. Students could commute more regularly on an additional train service.

I support the motion put forward by Mr Ramsay to this Parliament. I hope the support continues to grow after the by-elections are completed.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — It is unusual to have this order of speakers. I would also like to speak briefly on Mr Ramsay's motion. I have listened with great interest to the history of argy-bargy over this issue, which has resulted in very little being done in this area. It seems entirely sensible when all parties in this place are arguing for greater use of public transport, and particularly the fourth point of Mr Ramsay's motion, that we provide greater public transport options for those living in regional Victoria.

I cannot say that I am a terribly experienced Warrnambool line passenger, but I have certainly listened to others speak about it as well as having read about it over the last few days as I have looked at this motion. I have read that the Great South Coast Group and the G21 group have been pushing for this for a long time. I have listened to my colleague Mr Purcell raise this issue all year. I have also gone down to this area as part of my committee work and heard about the growing population in the area. This area in the south-western rail corridor catches almost 30 towns and cities and has a community population in excess of 300 000. I have heard about the delays and the overcrowding on the trains. We are also constantly hearing talk in this place about regional areas and a desire to really focus on them. This is something on which we seem to do a lot of talking but do not take a whole lot of action. After listening to the debate today this seems to be an ongoing issue.

We need to grant extra services to these growing regional populations in cities like Warrnambool. I understand that there are three train services per day — morning, midday and evening — from Geelong to Colac. I was very interested to hear about the one-way

coach service from Geelong to Colac in the late afternoon. Obviously this is not enough.

When I met with people to get their views on the nurse-patient ratio debate, which was held yesterday in this place, a number of hospitals in the region said to me, 'We just can't recruit in the area, and there is no way for people outside the area to get to the area'. These added services would help with that recruitment.

There are many other businesses in this area, whether they be health services or farming businesses, that need employees. They just cannot find them in the area. These added train services would enable them to recruit from outside their area, which they say they are screaming out for.

I understand that Mr Ramsay is asking for a fourth daily service. Having spoken to the people down there, I would like to up that figure and say that we need five regular daily services on this line.

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to make my contribution to the debate on Mr Ramsay's motion. It is an excellent motion that condemns the Andrews government for not supporting additional rail services on the Warrnambool to Geelong line.

I would like to take a step back to a time when we had a coalition government in Victoria and the members for South-West Coast and Polwarth in the Assembly, Denis Napthine and Terry Mulder, worked exceptionally hard to ensure that additional services could become a reality. At the time there were infrastructure concerns that would not facilitate the additional services we are talking about in this motion today, but those members advocated for their local communities to ensure that lines were upgraded and the Warncoort passing loop was installed so that these additional services could occur. The coalition government made a commitment that if it was re-elected, the additional rail service on the Warrnambool line would be implemented.

Of course it came to pass that Labor won government, and it has forgotten about regional Victoria and the needs of the communities of South-West Coast and Polwarth. We have by-elections coming up for the seats of South-West Coast and Polwarth, and Labor failed to even enlist candidates to run in those by-elections. It has forgotten not only about the rail services but about those electorates entirely. The government has abandoned regional Victoria and is not even standing candidates in those two seats. It is of no great surprise to me or my coalition colleagues that the Labor Party has forgotten regional Victorians, because it is only

those on our side of the house who represent regional Victoria.

As a result of the infrastructure upgrades that occurred under the coalition government, the additional rail services on the Warrnambool line are now possible. Of course this Labor government says it is looking into the possibility of adding services. It seems to be looking into a lot of things. I recall a forum that was held not so long ago in Ballarat to talk about jobs. Since then we have seen major job losses, and absolutely nothing has occurred as a result of that forum. There is a VicRoads relocation on the table that could certainly help the job situation in Ballarat, but Labor is just 'looking into it'. It is another talkfest.

Of course the additional rail service on the Warrnambool line would assist not just the residents of Warrnambool, a great regional city that is expected to grow by some 40 per cent over the next 20 years, but also those other towns and cities along the Warrnambool line, including Terang, Camperdown, Colac, Birregurra — which Mr Ramsay knows exceptionally well — and Winchelsea. Despite the best efforts of this Labor government, western Victoria is growing. It is growing despite the Labor government introducing thought bubbles about public holidays that nobody wanted or asked for and which only served to hurt small businesses and families in western Victoria. Further growth in the regional cities and towns of western Victoria, and indeed along the Warrnambool line, is being held back because of the Labor government's lack of investment in important services such as additional rail services on the Warrnambool to Geelong line and the Geelong to Melbourne line.

It is important to note that the commitment of additional rail services made by the former member for South-West Coast prior to the election included an additional service which would leave Warrnambool at 7.40 a.m. and arrive in Melbourne at 11.05 a.m. and another service which would depart Melbourne at 3.45 p.m. and arrive in Warrnambool at 7.00 p.m. Those services would have provided additional opportunities for residents along the Warrnambool line to visit Melbourne or Geelong for whatever reason, whether it be for educational opportunities or for medical appointments and the like. However, that will not occur because this Labor government has failed to invest in those extremely important additional services on the Warrnambool line.

We have members in this Parliament who care about regional Victoria. They care about the seats of South-West Coast and Polwarth. In the former Premier's electorate of South-West Coast we have a

fabulous candidate representing the Liberal Party in Roma Britnell. As a former dairy farmer from Woolsthorpe, Roma Britnell certainly understands the importance of additional rail infrastructure on the Warrnambool line. She is a recipient of the 2009 national Rural Women's Award as well as the Victorian Rural Woman of the Year award, and she is a Nuffield Scholar. She also served as vice-president of the United Dairy Farmers of Victoria until she won preselection to represent the Liberal Party in the great seat of South-West Coast.

Unfortunately the Labor Party has abandoned South-West Coast, as it has Polwarth. It did not even field a candidate. I know many are aghast that the Labor Party could possibly be forgetting rural and regional Victoria in such a way. In Polwarth, an electorate that would significantly benefit from the additional service, the Liberal Party has a great candidate for the by-election in Richard Riordan. He is managing director of his family business, Colac Hire and Riordan LPG, which has operated in the area for over five generations. I raise this just to illustrate the calibre of people the Liberal Party has putting their hands up to represent Polwarth in the Parliament. Those opposite have failed to even field a candidate in these by-elections. We have people who will stand up and be strong voices for both Polwarth and South-West Coast. However, the Labor Party has failed to do anything to represent these two great electorates.

Paragraph (3) of Mr Ramsay's motion notes that many complaints have been made at regional network community forums. Like Mr Ramsay, I along with many of my colleagues have attended these community forums, and the angst and outright anger that have been expressed at these forums goes some way towards indicating what members of the community feel has occurred under this Labor government. They have been abandoned. Members of this place had the misfortune to hear me make some comments about the effect of the regional rail link on the Ballarat train line. At regional network community forums, that view has been expressed in a very strong way by members of the community. Those who live along the Warrnambool train line have been abandoned by Labor because this additional train service has not been introduced. We know this additional service is critically needed in this growing community and region. However, Labor has seen fit to abandon the people of both Polwarth and South-West Coast.

It is extremely important that these additional services be implemented. The Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Matthew Guy, along with the shadow Minister for Public Transport and member for Croydon

in the Legislative Assembly, David Hodgett, have made the announcement that the coalition will introduce them. They made that announcement alongside our candidates for South-West Coast and Polwarth, Roma Britnell and Richard Riordan. Those members and candidates understand how important it is that these additional services are provided. To follow up on a point Mr Ramsay made, it appears that it is only Labor members who are not committed to this important additional service for western Victorians.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — It is with pleasure that I take this opportunity to contribute to the debate on Mr Ramsay's motion relating to rail services for the south-west of Victoria. There is an important issue in relation to this particular rail line. The coalition has moved on this to ensure that the people who have the opportunity to vote in the upcoming by-elections for the electorates of Polwarth and South-West Coast will know exactly where the respective parties stand. It is a sad indictment of Labor Party members that they are willing to come into this place and throw comments across the chamber. They do not want to get their hands dirty by running candidates in these by-elections and letting the electorate judge them on the work they have done so far. This indicates that at the moment Labor does not want to know about regional Victoria, and it does not want to know about regional rail services.

In the lead-up to the last election, \$178 million was on the table. We in the coalition have learnt our lesson that we did not get it right in Shepparton, that we did not act quickly enough and that we did not provide the rail services the community called for. Members of the community in Shepparton told us in very certain terms that, irrespective of what we said we were going to do, they were going to make us pay for what we did not do. When the result goes against you, if you do not heed that message, you are a fool.

We heard that message from the community of Shepparton, and we understand that other areas around the state also need improved rail services. During its term in government the coalition did work on paving the way for additional services for the south-west of the state — for Colac, Camperdown, the area past Geelong and down to the Warrnambool line. The services that are being called for now were identified during the previous term of government. They were resourced and catered for in the budget outcomes and predictions, but unfortunately the coalition did not get the opportunity to deliver on them. It is a matter of continual flow; the Labor Party should be investing in this. Even though Labor does not have representatives in these lower house electorates, it should still be investing in these rail services.

It is well acknowledged that Warrnambool is one of the growth regions of this state. It has been battling high levels of growth for the last 7 to 10 years. This has been an issue for Warrnambool at the council level, and it is no wonder that Mike Neoh, The Nationals candidate for the electorate of South-West Coast, has been advocating for these rail services for many years. Good on him for doing so! Mike Neoh will continue to advocate for these services throughout the by-election, but irrespective of what happens, whether The Nationals are successful or somebody else wins, Mike Neoh will continue to advocate for these services, not because there is a four-week window of opportunity with the by-election but because he knows it is the right thing for the region. He knows how important it is that a city the size of Warrnambool and the towns and regions along that line have these extra services.

I have seen firsthand the impact additional rail services can have on a regional city. I saw that in the example of Bendigo. I have also seen the damage done by the Labor Party when it did not do the job properly. When it built additional services to Bendigo, it ripped up half of the second line. From Kyneton through to Bendigo we now have a single line rather than the two lines we had for the first 100 years of that rail service. That was absolute short-sightedness. Labor tried to sell the public a furphy and tried to complete a project on the cheap. Labor did not care about these matters, and now the city of Bendigo is constrained because it has only that one line plus a couple of passing loops in the first 80 to 100 kilometres towards Kyneton. This is a real problem, and it is now coming to the fore as the need for those services is increasing. Growth is needed to push forward, but we cannot achieve that, because trains often need to pass each other, but without a passing loop they are forced to stop.

As those who have been following the by-election over the last few weeks would know, Mike Neoh is the mayor of Warrnambool, which is one of Victoria's fastest growing regional cities. He has been on the record many times advocating for these additional rail services to Warrnambool.

An honourable member — How many times have you said 'Mike Neoh'?

Mr DRUM — At least I do not talk about my partner every day in Parliament. I am somewhat constrained as to how many times I can talk about my partner. But anyway, each to their own.

It is also very important to understand that regional development and additional rail services go hand in glove. You cannot have one without the other. If you do

not heed the lessons or warnings of other areas around the state, you are a fool. We have learnt our lessons, and the people of the south-west of Victoria can bet their bottom dollar that the coalition will never let regional rail services fall behind ever again. We understand how important they are. The Nationals have learnt the lesson. We will advocate like no-one else could ever advocate for better and improved rail services — rail services that continue to lead regional development in this state.

I hope that both David O'Brien, The Nationals candidate for Polwarth, and Michael Neoh are given the opportunity to continue that advocacy from inside the Parliament. We all know David O'Brien has been a member of Parliament previously and Mike Neoh has been a councillor on the Warrnambool City Council. If it does not work out for them at the by-election, they will continue to advocate in the roles they hold in their communities. Hopefully, irrespective of what happens in the by-election, the Labor government today or a coalition government in the future will improve the rail services that are needed for the area of the south-west of Victoria.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Wyndham police resources

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — My question is for Mr Herbert as the minister representing the Minister for Police. It concerns police resourcing in the Wyndham council area. Since my election as a member for Western Metropolitan Region I have become increasingly aware that there are not enough police officers or stations to cope with the population growth in the Wyndham area, which is having a devastating impact on the local community. My understanding from Police Association Victoria is that the first response officer-to-resident ratio in Wyndham is less than half that of the state average. I note from a government media release issued on Monday that custody officer laws will assist in freeing up police officers. However, this release did not name Wyndham as either a pilot or a priority station. What is the government doing to ensure that the officer-to-resident ratio is improved so that the people of Wyndham can be served by the police resources and capacity they need and deserve?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I thank Dr Carling-Jenkins for her question and her concern for law and order in the Wyndham area and in fact in all the areas she represents. Of course

Labor is and always has been committed to appropriate and strong policing levels. In fact in May 2010 — we can go back to then — we committed funding for 1966 extra frontline police. The 2015–16 state budget delivered a record \$2.5 billion for Victoria Police to continue its work in keeping our community safe. Indeed the budget also invested nearly \$150 million — \$148 million or \$149 million — for police custody officers, the legislation for whom is of course coming before this Parliament, so that 400 police officers could be redeployed to the front line. That is a straight redeployment there.

These custody officers are among 600 additional police personnel introduced by the government, including forensic scientists. It is not just frontline police; there is a whole range of police involved: transit police, protective services officers and detectives dedicated to supervising serious sex offenders on supervision orders. Whilst government provides the resources, it is true to say that it is the Chief Commissioner of Police who is responsible for determining how those resources are allocated. We would not seek to do that in terms of operational needs across the state.

On the specifics of the area the member referred to, I am advised that across the north west metro division 2, which includes the Wyndham police service area, there has been an increase of more than 85 police since November 2010. These were all positions budgeted by the previous Labor government.

Supplementary question

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his response and for his obvious commitment to police resourcing. In my discussions with various groups, including Police Association Victoria, the Point Cook Action Group and a number of local constituents, it has become clear that as well as a significant increase in police resources across Wyndham, a police station in Point Cook is critical to ensure public safety. I ask the minister: will the government commit to a new police station in Point Cook, and if so, when can the community expect it?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — It is a bit beyond my capability to give a commitment to that one right now! I will say, though, that I think we have put in an extra five officers at Werribee police station and an extra five at Wyndham North just this year. I am happy to take the question about Point Cook on notice, and I will refer it through. I surmise, however, that this is part of a budget issue as well as discussions with operational police command. We would take those discussions very seriously.

Medicinal cannabis

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for Mr Herbert, representing the Minister for Police. The Premier, Daniel Andrews, said that yesterday was one of the proudest days of his political career as he was able to take on board the recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission report into medicinal cannabis and announce that Victoria would move to legalise medicinal cannabis for people suffering a range of serious illnesses. Only months ago I asked the government to stop pursuing criminal convictions against those using or possessing cannabis for medicinal purposes while the Victorian Law Reform Commission was considering its report. Legalising medicinal cannabis was an election promise anyway, and it was unfair to continue to prosecute people who were helping to push this whole issue to a head.

In light of the Premier's announcement yesterday I ask again: given that the government has now moved to legalise cannabis for medicinal purposes, will it stop pursuing criminal convictions against those administering or using cannabis products — for themselves or their children — to alleviate their suffering until this legislation has passed?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I guess the law is the law, and the law will be administered as the law is. That is a basic tenet of our Parliament and of our legislative, policing and judicial systems. It is not for me to specifically answer the question; I guess I can seek an answer, but I would say that the law is the law, and until the law changes, it should be upheld.

Supplementary question

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. Medical cannabis is to become a prescribed drug alongside Zoloft, OxyContin and Mogadon. Given that we do not currently have a roadside impairment test for prescription drugs — the drugs which we now know are killing Victorians at rates higher than any illicit substances — will the government ensure that it will look to create a measurement for tetrahydrocannabinol blood content so that people who are using cannabis products for a range of medical conditions will know how much of their medicine they can consume and still be able to operate a vehicle?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I thank the member for her question and her long-term interest in this area. I guess it is fair to say

that in terms of the medical cannabis — the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes for those in prescribed circumstances, where there are few other options, if any — that legislation will come before the Parliament, and of course in that there will be protocols developed in terms of the member's substantive question and her secondary question, which I presume relates to that substantive question, although it is a bit of a long bow. Nevertheless, obviously there will be protocols. It is a very sophisticated area. There will be discussions with the federal government of course. There has to be a lot worked through on that, but that will be part of the process.

On the issue of roadside testing, I am happy to refer it on, but I understand that these are issues that are done through national protocols and issues that are dealt with through the police. Obviously there are complexities in terms of how you do the testing, in terms of the different sorts of drugs. It is beyond my capacity to give the member a straight answer on that one, but I will refer it on.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister referred to the supplementary question as a long bow, and I must indicate that from the Chair I also thought there was a tenuous link between the supplementary question and the substantive question. Members need to have regard to a minister's answer and to matters that really are apposite to the original question when asking a supplementary question. I think Ms Patten did actually get away with asking two questions — two substantive questions — today.

Timber industry

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Agriculture, and it refers to an *Age* report of 13 July stating that low-grade native timber could be shipped to China and other countries to help an ailing VicForests. The report stated that the timber industry has been lobbying government to relax local processing requirements so export can take place. Will the minister inform the house of any negotiations and contracts VicForests is conducting with Chinese companies or companies in other parts of Asia for the export of native timber to such markets and how this fits with the role of the industry task force providing leadership on — and I quote — 'job protection'?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Ms Dunn for her question. The relaxation of the requirement around domestic processing that Ms Dunn's question is about was approved by the coalition government last year, and indeed it has its origins in the former Labor government's *Our Forests*,

Our Future statement from 2004. It relates to the sunsetting of arrangements that existed to assist with transition, and specifically section 86A of the State Owned Enterprises Act 1992.

There are no contracts or other arrangements that have been entered into or that are being negotiated, so this does not actually apply to any particular thing as such at the moment. Everything that occurred before 1 July remains protected by the provisions that existed prior to the new arrangements. My department is currently investigating appropriate mechanisms to ensure that VicForests explores all options for domestic processing before any export contracts are considered. Our priority is jobs for people in Victoria, and that will continue to be the focus.

Supplementary question

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her answer. In the same article the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union national secretary, Michael O'Connor, stated that exporting unprocessed wood to countries like China represented a 'low road' in terms of economic and social return. Does the minister agree that exporting unprocessed timber to China and other countries is the low road and is undermining the 500 or thereabouts local jobs in the timber industry?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I caution the minister that to some extent that supplementary question calls for an opinion as distinct from responding with a factual matter. The minister might bear that in mind in her answer.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the member for her supplementary question. We are committed to exploring strong and effective trade relationships with China, as I am sure every member of the house is well aware. Indeed there has been a great deal of discussion in recent times about some of the opportunities that are presented to Victorian industries, not least of all our food and fibre industries, arising out of the free trade agreement, but I would reiterate the answer that I provided to the first part of Ms Dunn's question and again state that our priority is to protect Victorian jobs. I have asked the department to provide advice to me about how we can ensure that those opportunities for Victorians are always explored first.

Bushfire preparedness

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government, representing the Premier. With regard to the planned

burn in the Cobaw State Forest that was conducted last week, why was this controlled burn done late last week and allowed to continue over the weekend, given the long weekend and also the clear expectation of hot weather and high winds in the following days?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank the member for her question. As she would understand, the management of the fuel reduction burning program is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, and I am certain she in the last few days has been seeking the advice of her department and the agency undertaking this work in accordance with what would be community anxiety that may have arisen subsequent to the controlled burning program in the last few days.

As the member and the chamber would be mindful of, there is an extensive program across Victoria in terms of fuel reduction. The majority of the program, about 80 per cent, takes place in autumn, following the summer season, and in fact about 20 per cent of it takes place in spring. Therefore a limited amount of activity is undertaken across the Victorian landscape in the lead-up to summer. Under normal circumstances you would hope and expect that would be undertaken within clear and strict procedures and protocols that contain the size, the scale and the safety of that burning program. In this case we are dealing with circumstances where it has not been demonstrated that the fuel reduction burn was completed in a timely and appropriate fashion to guarantee safety, given those changes in temperature conditions.

Overall, in terms of the management of the program — and it has been the case under previous administrations, both coalition and Labor — very few fuel reduction burning programs get away from the managed approach. In fact probably less than 2 per cent of fuel reduction burning programs over the last decade have led to circumstances such as the one in question. Under normal circumstances quality assurances are put in place, procedures are put in place and the management of the program is in place to limit this experience. It is appropriate that the community is concerned about it, that questions are asked and that the government responds in an appropriate way.

Our first priority in this instance is to bring fire under control, to bring certainty to the community and then to be able to account for the measures that should be in place and to improve on those quality assurances. I am certain that my colleague will be responsive to that examination in the days to come.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the Leader of the Government for his response. In response to that, does the minister know — or if he is unable to respond, I ask that he take this on notice — if there were reduced staffing levels to undertake the Cobaw State Forest controlled burn due to the grand final parade public holiday?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Certainly in the first instance, on the basis of my knowledge base, I do not believe that to be the case, so I want to immediately respond to that, but I will get a fulsome response and provide it to the Parliament subsequently.

Public holidays

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade as the minister responsible for the public holidays in Victoria. Can the minister advise the house if there have been any discussions held with government or if he has received any advice or correspondence from parties seeking two additional public holidays — namely, the Monday before Melbourne Cup Day and Remembrance Day?

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I have had no direct requests, conversations, emails, text messages or phone calls to me personally, nor am I aware of any to my office. However, in order to ensure the appropriateness of the response I will also take that on notice and ask the same question of my department.

Supplementary question

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. Given his response, can the minister guarantee to Victorians that he will not gazette any more public holidays in the term of this Andrews government?

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — What I can guarantee to all Victorians is that Mr Ondarchie is part of a political party that wishes to rip away and steal back this public holiday from all Victorians, just like Jeff Kennett did in the 1990s.

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, President, on relevance, it was a very narrow question, simply seeking a guarantee that the minister will not gazette any more public holidays. It was a very narrow

question, and I suggest that if he chooses not to answer it, that sends us a message too.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Has the minister completed his answer?

Mr DALIDAKIS — No, I am still going.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will allow the minister to complete the answer.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, President. On the public holiday in question the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Guy, and his office failed to answer any phone calls either at his electorate office or at his opposition office, which makes me think that despite the faux outrage from those opposite in fact they enjoyed the public holiday. Furthermore, I have responsibility for all the public holidays across Victoria. The government intends to keep its election commitments, and no other public holidays were part of any of its commitments.

Automotive industry

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. Ford Australia will cease manufacturing exactly one year from today, with Holden and Toyota to follow. These closures will affect the whole supply chain, predominantly small business, for which the minister is responsible. Can the minister detail to the house the plans he has implemented so far, and will over the next year, to support these small businesses in the automotive sector?

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I thank the honourable member for his question. It is pretty galling for those people affected to get a question from those opposite who sat on their behinds and did nothing while the federal Treasurer, Joe Hockey, and the state Liberal government at the time saw the automotive industry sent offshore. It was as a direct result of all the people over there and their cousins in Canberra — —

Mr Drum — On a point of order, President, I am baffled as to why Mr Dalidakis would mention the federal government on this when this happened under the Julia Gillard reign of the Labor Party. I am calling the minister back to relevance, to stop debating this and rewriting history. He is debating the question, and his answer has nothing to do with the question that he was actually asked.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Drum sometimes tests me, because he took the opportunity yet again to debate rather than to come to a point of order. He was

saved, just, by indicating that there was a relevance issue in the minister's answer. That was the only life jacket he had. I accept that the minister has been putting some context to his answer. Nonetheless, Mr Ondarchie's question was quite specific and it was prospective rather than retrospective in terms of the history that members of the house are aware of, albeit that they may have different perspectives on it. I ask the minister to respond in a manner that is apposite to the question.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, President, and I will get to that very quickly. It is important to once again place very clearly on *Hansard* that the reason the automotive industry is leaving these shores is because the Liberal state government, under Baillieu, Shaw and Napthine, and the federal Liberal government dared the automotive industry to leave, which has left us in the position we are in today. Furthermore, the Minister for Industry, the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, is working on her plan at the moment to assist the automotive industry across the supply chain. Her plan will assist all businesses — large, medium and small alike — in whatever occurs as a direct result of the economic vandalism that was seen under the Napthine, Shaw, Baillieu and Abbott governments.

Supplementary question

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My further question to the Minister for Doing Nothing is around — —

The PRESIDENT — Order!

Mr ONDARCHIE — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. Given that the Premier said that 'every job is worth fighting for', why is it that the automotive sector small business community has heard nothing from the minister since he became the minister?

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — In fact I have already visited what the honourable member would consider small businesses within the automotive sector. I have also been to large businesses in the automotive sector. What I will tell you, President, is that each and every one of the businesses I have been to has named and shamed the state and federal Liberal governments for being in the position they are in today, because they did not care for the industry. All they wanted to do was try to play ideological politics with the industry, which has seen these jobs go offshore.

Multicultural affairs grants

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government in his capacity as representing the Premier and is asked with acknowledgement of the strong commitment to multiculturalism across all parties in this chamber. In view of the tragic events in Sydney involving the New South Wales police department I ask if the government will immediately reverse its position from that taken earlier this year and confirmed by the Premier yesterday and now fund short-term initiatives from the social cohesion and resilience funding targeting the removal of online material which promotes hate or seeks to recruit and radicalise, with the intention being to reduce the risk of such tragic events occurring in Victoria.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank the member particularly for her preamble to the question because I think there is recognition, hopefully across the Parliament and in the community, about the need for us to try to find very productive and cooperative relationships across the diversity of our community to ensure that we stay a harmonious and safe state. That should be our overriding commitment not only in terms of our focus and our engagement with the community but also as a measure of the programs that we fund and support to try to assist that effort.

Without making any presumptions about the specific program the member refers to — whether it had in any shape or form a linear connection to the circumstances that may have led to the tragedies in New South Wales I do not know — I am certain that my colleagues who are responsible across agencies for dealing with multicultural affairs, with the police, with community safety and with the government's agenda of social inclusion and participation across the cultural diversity of our state in all of our programs and in all of our efforts will be open to suggestions that will make a positive contribution.

I know there is a cabinet committee chaired by my colleague the Deputy Premier that looks at a range of programs and program responsibilities across a number of departments and has a standing brief to consider the appropriate support that we provide to our community. I am certain that my colleagues will be interested in any positive suggestion that will make a contribution, and I will take this opportunity to raise this matter with them.

Supplementary question

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister. I have called for some short-term

response in relation to this issue by rolling out funding for grassroots programs. That has been ruled out and the focus has been on the medium and long-term strategies, so I appreciate the minister's response in calling for the funding of short-term responses for the purpose that I have indicated. However, given the minister's answer, could I ask also what customised grassroots programs have been rolled out by the Andrews government across the different portfolios to which the minister has referred in order to respond to the threats of radicalisation of young people?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I am happy to obtain the information relating to the conclusion of the supplementary question. In my answer I was not quite as fulsome in support of any programmatic response, as may have been indicated in the preamble to that supplementary question, so I put that on the public record to say we are open to looking at all programs — short, medium and long-term. I did not necessarily indicate any support for any particular program, but I am very happy to provide appropriate dialogue within government about the active consideration of those matters, and I will report back on the other issues on the basis of the advice that I obtain from my colleagues.

Early childhood educators

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Families and Children, and I ask: can the minister guarantee that the costs of the new heads of agreement signed recently for the early childhood education sector will be covered by government and not passed on to parents through higher fees?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question. As I referred to this morning in my ministers statement, we had a situation where for two years we had unresolved industrial disputation occurring between the kindergarten providers in this state and kindergarten professionals, both kindergarten teachers and educators, and what we had from the previous minister was a complete lack of action. The situation got to the point where stop-work action was taken late last year, and the issue was unresolved when we came to government.

Negotiations had stalled for two years because the previous government failed to take action on the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) issue, failed to take action on the implementation of the new kindergarten ratios and failed on so many other issues in relation to our early years services. We made election commitments to assist the parties to resolve this

dispute, and we honoured that promise. From the start of the year my department was actively involved in the discussions with the various parties to assist them to resolve the matter.

As I advised the house this morning in my ministers statement, I am very pleased that the parties have reached agreement. There was a heads of agreement signed very recently. We the government took action to ensure that this matter could be resolved, ensuring a win-win situation for all parties — for parents, who have now got the certainty of knowing that we have quality educators — —

Ms Crozier — On a point of order, President, my question was quite specific in relation to asking the minister whether the cost will be covered by government and not passed on to parents. I ask you to draw her back to the specifics of my question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister has not yet completed her answer. I am aware, and was mindful, of the fact that the question went to how the agreement provisions would be funded, and I am anticipating that that will form part of the answer that the minister is to complete.

Ms MIKAKOS — The point that I am wishing to make is that we have achieved a very good outcome in assisting the parties to resolve this matter, and this is a good deal and a good outcome for Victorian families that have been impacted upon by the total inaction of the previous government to resolve this dispute. The proposed EBA is critical to attracting quality educators to our kindergarten sector, and by achieving parity for kindergarten teachers with primary school teachers we can help to stem the tide of qualified teachers leaving one sector and going to the other.

What the member clearly does not understand, as I have explained on previous occasions, is that we do not have mandatory kindergarten in Victoria. It is voluntary participation, and in historic circumstances — —

Ms Crozier — On a point of order, President, I was trying to give the minister the courtesy of another minute and a half to get to the specifics of my question. I ask that you draw her back to answering what I specifically asked: whether the cost will be passed on.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister has not yet completed her answer. She will have that opportunity, and if the answer is not provided, then I will be asking for a written response. In completing her answer I do not want the minister to revisit what the previous government did; let us move on.

Ms MIKAKOS — The member clearly does not want me to give her a fulsome answer, because the point I am wishing to make is that there has been a historic situation, which applied under the previous government as well, in which parents, as well as the state government, make a contribution to the cost of kindergarten. Parents will be making a very modest contribution to the cost of the new EBA arrangements — an extremely modest contribution — and that is in accordance with the arrangements that were in place under the previous government as well.

Supplementary question

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her answer, and I ask: what is the financial cost of the new agreement to both the state government and Victorian parents?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question. There has been a tradition of not disclosing the full funding envelope in these matters because it may well impact on future EBA negotiations with parties, but I can assure the house that there will be a very modest impact on parents in accordance with the split of 65 per cent contribution from the state and 35 per cent contribution from parents. I am advised that the anticipated cost to parents is about \$1 per week, so it is a very modest increase. In return parents will be getting better quality outcomes because we will have a situation in which we will continue to attract and retain quality qualified educators and teachers in the kindergarten sector. This is an outcome that the opposition should be welcoming. We have achieved this outcome because the previous government failed to take action for two whole years.

Port of Melbourne lease

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. I refer to the government's announcement by press release last Wednesday of changes to the proposed port of Melbourne regulatory regime, including its new proposal to publish capacity levels and trigger points for compensation after the lease transaction is concluded. Given that those factors will determine the extent of any future compensation or refund from the state to the lessee, why will the government not determine and publish those factors ahead of the transaction to provide an assurance to Victorians that the transaction does in fact represent a value-for-money proposition?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I smile because Mr Rich-Phillips, who is actually chairing a select committee in relation to matters dealing with the lease of the port, is spending many hours in consideration and scrutiny at hearings yet uses this forum to obtain further advice on that matter. Whilst I am smiling about that, it does not mean that it abrogates my responsibility to be responsive.

We have clearly seen, both during the period of consideration by the select committee and in terms of the public policy that the government has taken on these matters, that at various times we have taken decisions about the appropriate nature of the release and disclosure of information in the public domain in terms of the underpinning preparatory work and the undertaking of the tender arrangements. We make judgement calls about the appropriateness of the level of detail at certain junctures in terms of the public concern, community concern, institutional concern and matters that may require more fulsome explanation of the public policy settings, the underpinning of the financial structures and the circumstances associated with the piece of legislation and contractual arrangements.

Basically the answer to Mr Rich-Phillips's question is that my colleagues have made decisions based upon the best way they believe they can marry up the momentum to support and establish the leasing arrangements and to support the implementation of the legislation that we are hoping to pass as a government. We are mindful of our obligations to assist the committee in its work and we are mindful of being responsive to institutional settings, such as the calls that were made upon the government to release information last week, and we were responsive. I would anticipate that we will continue to be responsive between now and the end of Mr Rich-Phillips's committee's considerations and ultimately, from my perspective, the end of the successful conclusion of the committee stage of the bill in this chamber before the end of the year.

Supplementary question

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. To take up his point about the select committee inquiry, indeed if that mechanism were providing all the answers required, I would not be asking questions in here. But I thank the minister for his response.

Given that the capacity levels and the trigger points will determine future compensation and the present value of the sale, what assurance can the government provide, in the absence of publishing those numbers now, that the

government is appropriately striking the balance between the long-term value of that lease and maximising the short-term revenue from the transaction in the next six months?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Rich-Phillips for his question; it is a good question. What the government is trying to provide for is that if and when the lease — and from our perspective we trust it will be when the lease — is entered into the people of Victoria will derive an immediate return to the asset base of Victoria that can be redistributed and put to another purpose. That is in the first instance, so we do have an interest in making sure that we achieve a good financial return for the people of Victoria now. But we are also mindful of the lease conditions and the maximum utility of that lease in terms of maximising the capacity of that leasing arrangement and incentivising the operator of the lease to maximise their investment. That is the reason why we structured what is described as a compensation term, but hopefully we will use it as an inducement to maximising the net effect of that asset.

The PRESIDENT — Order! In respect of today's questions, I indicate that in relation to Ms Wooldridge's supplementary question to Mr Jennings on the burn issue, the minister has undertaken to obtain some further information, and that will be provided within two days.

Mr Dalidakis in respect of Mr Ondarchie's first substantive question sought to establish whether there had been any representations to the minister's office for additional public holidays, because he has not had those representations. But he has undertaken to check whether or not his office or the department has received any such representations. That answer is to be provided tomorrow.

In respect of Mrs Peulich's question on what short-term programs might have been provided to address some community harmony issues, Mr Jennings has undertaken to ascertain from his colleagues if he is able to provide some further information on that, and that will be provided in two days.

I am of the view that in her supplementary answer Ms Mikakos did address the cost factor and also indicated the ratio of about two for one, government to family. That leaves Ms Crozier to do some maths as to the overall cost, but I believe the minister actually satisfied that question by way of the supplementary answer.

With regard to Dr Carling-Jenkins's question to Mr Herbert in respect of the possibilities for a new police station at Point Cook, the minister did provide an answer that I think was responsive to the question, but he may well be able to pursue whether or not there is some further information that would be available to Dr Carling-Jenkins in the short term. As that involves the minister in another place, that is to be provided in two days.

In regard to Ms Patten's question to Mr Herbert in respect of the moratorium on the possession of testing drugs — which was a supplementary question; indeed it was her second substantive question — the minister was responsive to that to the extent he could be with the knowledge available at the moment. But he will also see if there has been any further consideration of that moratorium aspect. I indicate that the minister has previously provided an answer along those lines, and I think Ms Patten referred to her previous question. She would be aware of the answer that was provided on that occasion, so really what the minister will be doing now is seeing if there has been any change in the position of the government subsequent to that report and the information released yesterday.

Ms Patten — On a point of order, President, the supplementary question was in regard to tetrahydrocannabinol roadside testing, because medicinal cannabis is to become a prescription drug and there is no roadside testing for prescription drugs. It was separate to the moratorium.

The PRESIDENT — Order! All right. I have picked up the wrong thing, but yes, the roadside testing is the issue, and that is to be provided in two days.

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, President, relating to the question that I asked the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade as it related to small business in the automotive sector, the minister said in his response that the Minister for Industry is in fact looking after the arrangements for small businesses in the automotive sector. I wonder if I could seek a fulsome response to my question through the minister's office via the industry minister's office?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am not prepared to make a direction to that effect, because Mr Ondarchie's question was specifically directed to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. I am afraid Mr Ondarchie will have to come back another time to address the different minister, which will be tomorrow presumably. I am not prepared to give a direction, because the question was specific to the minister. The minister did provide an answer, which suggested that

another minister had jurisdiction, so I understand why Mr Ondarchie is seeking that information, but in terms of the protocols of dealing with these questions and answers I cannot direct the minister to provide that information from another minister when in fact that was not the question.

Mrs Peulich — President, I hope you are taking your manuka honey! On a point of order and without labouring the point too much, in relation to my supplementary question, the question was to identify or inform the house of the range of grassroots programs that may be delivered on the ground across government to reduce the threat of radicalisation rather than generally speaking about promoting harmony. I just make that point.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I accept that, and I know the minister understands that. I just paraphrased. My apologies if the paraphrasing was not adequate.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Western Victoria Region

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water and relates to Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve, a magnificent national park located 14 kilometres west of Warrnambool. My concern is that we are seeing many interactions between wildlife and motor vehicles on roads such as the Princes Highway, which adjoins Tower Hill. It is there that these incidents are occurring and placing at risk the lives of motorists and wildlife alike. My question is: can the minister investigate what can be done to ensure the safety of both motorists and wildlife in the vicinity of the Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Youth Affairs. It comes via the Banyule and Nillumbik Youth Services Network, which is the major connecting body for youth services in the area and has workers representing organisations from a range of fields across the youth sector. The network is an ongoing initiative towards improved service provision for young people, the identification of youth needs and priorities, service planning and development on a needs basis to foster successful outcomes for young people.

One of the major difficulties identified by the network is the current housing crisis for the approximately 6130 young Victorian people aged 12 to 25 who have

nowhere to call home. My question is: what is the state government's plan to address the lack of affordable local accommodation, in particular the lack of crisis accommodation and affordable long-term one-bedroom properties, in Northern Metropolitan Region?

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question this afternoon is to the Minister for Emergency Services. It involves the current discussion and debate around the old high school site in Colac. Advice from the Minister for Education in response to a matter I raised in the adjournment debate is that the Department of Education and Training is looking at selling that site. Already the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Matthew Guy, and the Liberal candidate for Polwarth, Richard Riordan, have indicated they would support a new police station in Colac. Given that the Country Fire Authority has outlived its premises in Bromfield Street, it seems an opportunity to look at the possibility of creating a centralised emergency services hub. I ask the minister if she would look at conducting a feasibility study to look at potentially using the former site of the Colac High School for an emergency services hub to enable a regional response to emergency situations.

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is addressed to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Robin Scott. I ask the minister to inform me, so I can update my constituents, whether the government is supporting the Big West Festival this year. This is a festival that celebrates the unique social, cultural and geographic landscape of Melbourne's western suburbs. I ask: is the minister able to provide information about the funding that will be provided for this festival, which showcases the vibrancy of Victoria's multiculturalism and the region I proudly represent?

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Robin Scott. Representing an area which has a significant multicultural demographic, I am inundated with questions about the expiration of the terms of the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) commissioners. It has now been in excess of five weeks since the terms of six hardworking VMC commissioners expired, and no announcement has been made about reappointment. VMC commissioners do important work and inform the minister of policies,

programs and initiatives that are required. My question to the minister is: can he stop dragging the chain, read the material in his in-tray and make a decision as to the appointment of the VMC commissioners, who have been in limbo for a number of weeks?

Western Victoria Region

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Mental Health, and my question relates to the minister's recent announcement of \$5.5 million in funding from the Andrews Labor government for mental health services and other services that treat people who are dependent on alcohol and other drugs. This investment by the Labor government is very important in supporting Victoria's community-based services to meet contemporary standards and in improving treatment for some of Victoria's most vulnerable people. I ask the minister to inform me how community-based organisations in my electorate of Western Victoria Region can access this funding and what guidelines are in place for its allocation and usage.

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer the minister to the statement by the member for Sunbury in the other place to the Sunbury Train Association that timetables and schedules for services to Sunbury for next year would be finalised in November 2015. Will the minister confirm information received by the Sunbury Train Association that the scheduling of services to Sunbury for January 2016 was completed approximately two months ago and that Mr Josh Bull's advice was another deception the people of Sunbury have had to suffer at the hands of the Andrews Labor government?

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is very marginal.

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thought that too, President. My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan. I understand a group will be formed to look at a potential Box Hill interchange. I have received correspondence from local councillors and individuals who would like to have some personal input into that process. The question I ask the minister is whether her department has plans to hold open forums at the end of this year or early next year.

Northern Victoria Region

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. A range of towns and communities throughout Northern Victoria Region are facing the real threat of bushfires. Due to the concerns of constituents there I ask that the minister provide me with the necessary data that will outline what the prescribed burn targets are for Northern Victoria Region and what the prescribed burn schedule is for the short window of the spring period. As Minister Jennings has said, this takes up only a small percentage of the schedule; however, it is an important percentage. Whilst my inquiries are based on data for prescribed burn targets for the spring session in Northern Victoria Region, I would also welcome the minister providing this information to me for regions right across the state. If that does not suit the minister, could I just have the prescribed burn data for the spring session for Northern Victoria Region?

Sitting suspended 1.57 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

WARRNAMBOOL–GEELONG RAIL SERVICES

Debate resumed.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I strongly support the motion put forward by Mr Ramsay, and I commend him, as indeed I commend Mr Morris, on the magnificent work they are doing to support the people of western Victoria.

There may be members who will think it odd that a member for Western Metropolitan Region would be speaking on this particular motion, but my history goes back to my days as a lad in Colac. I grew up on a dairy farm just outside of Colac, and let me tell you, I know a cow when I see one. I will leave that alone.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Ondarchie, I will milk it for all it is worth.

I recall only too well that from time to time the train from Melbourne seemed to be the link between us and civilisation. As a callow youth in those days — and I know there may be some in the chamber who might have trouble believing that I was a youth, but indeed I was — I used to move between my school in Sunbury and my home in Colac, and I used to catch the train. I remember that train very well. All those years ago there were two train services a day, and I have to say it astounds me that now, after all these years with all of

the changes that we have seen in the state, there is only one extra train a day on the Warrnambool line. I find that astonishing, and it is perhaps somewhat of an indictment of a number of governments.

Mr Herbert interjected.

Mr FINN — This government is currently in power and the buck has to stop somewhere. I am sure Mr Herbert will be very pleased to take any bucks he can get hold of, and this one has landed directly at his feet.

I think back to my days on the farm at a place called Coragulac — in fact it was Alvie, Warrion and Coragulac. We moved three times without actually shifting because the post office in those time was pretty much the same as the post office these days. The staff did not quite know what was going on half the time. I recall that in those days there was a great sense of isolation. The school bus to Colac would often take up to an hour and a half to get there. To describe that as an effective means of public transport would probably be pushing a point. When I heard people in this chamber talking about the sense of isolation felt by people in the country who lack access to public transport, I could certainly relate to it. I commend Mr Ramsay for bringing forward this motion today so that we can discuss this sort of thing.

I have to say that under this government there is probably not much chance that the Warrnambool line will get extra train services. We already have a situation where the Andrews Labor government is pulling train services from places such as Sunbury. After being promised that the V/Line services to Sunbury would remain, we have been told that will change and Sunbury will lose significant coverage. If you are going to see that in a place like Sunbury, which is relatively close to Melbourne, you will certainly see very little improvement for the people of Colac, Camperdown, Warrnambool, Winchelsea and so forth down the track. And Birregurra of course; I would be remiss not to mention Birregurra.

Mr Barber — Camperdown.

Mr FINN — I did mention Camperdown, Mr Barber. I should throw in Terang as well. I am glad Mr Barber stuck his head up, because I was going to mention him. I know he has spent a great deal of time in the Western District.

Mr Davis — Family holidays?

Mr FINN — I do not think it was for family holidays. He has been down there in the hope that the

Greens might get some sort of electoral windfall or boost from his campaigning efforts. I have to say to Mr Barber — I will take him into my confidence here — that country people and particularly the people in the Western District have very strong BS meters. When Mr Barber goes down there, those meters probably go into meltdown. The people of the Western District of Victoria will never vote green as long as their tails point to the ground. It is not going to happen.

In the tradition of friendliness I will make a suggestion: the Greens should not bother with the Western District. If they follow the example of Labor members, who have given up on it altogether and walked away, they will be a lot better off. They should work on the areas in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, where they have a chance. Earlier we were discussing the possibility of getting a tram for Colac, but I think that is highly unlikely, even during a by-election campaign. In the spirit of warmth and friendliness, I offer that advice to Mr Barber. It is a waste of time for him to go down there to try to get the people of western Victoria to vote for the Greens, because they will not. Those people will not fall for the empty rhetoric of the Greens. They know the causes of a whole range of problems, and when Mr Barber goes down there they see another one coming. I would suggest to Mr Barber that he is most certainly wasting his time.

Mr Ramsay's motion is a very good one, but I fear we will have to wait for the return of a coalition government after the next election for those services to come to Warrnambool. I do not believe this government will provide any joy at all for anybody.

Mr Herbert interjected.

Mr FINN — There will be no joy from this Labor government. I will put it this way, for the benefit of Mr Herbert: if the Labor government will not do anything for the people of the western suburbs, why would they do anything for the people of western Victoria? It is a nonsense to suggest that will happen. I commend Mr Ramsay for trying. He is a conscientious and hardworking local member who stands up for his constituents in this Parliament, and he is to be commended for that.

I look forward to seeing Richard Riordan and Roma Britnell joining us here in the Parliament early next month.

Mr Dalidakis — Who?

Mr FINN — You will find out, brother. It is coming.

Mr Dalidakis — Comrade.

Mr FINN — No. In the spirit of friendliness and warmth that I exude from time to time, I say that I look forward to that. I have not met Roma as yet. I look forward to doing that. I have known Richard for some years. The Riordan family are icons of Colac, I think you could say. They know that area very well, and the area knows them very well. Richard will be the ultimate local member. He will be an excellent member. I know from people who have spoken to me about Roma that she will be the same for the South-West Coast electorate. I look forward to them coming into this Parliament and joining Mr Ramsay and Mr Morris as very strong and firm voices for western Victoria. I think that is something we should all be quite excited about.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Leane is very excited about it. You can tell when Mr Leane gets excited. It is obvious to all concerned.

Mr Ramsay — Is there a coup coming?

Mr FINN — Is there a coup coming? We know there is a coup coming, but Mr Ramsay is getting me off track. I could talk about that for a while. Who put Mr Somyurek and Mr Melhem together? Dear me, they were asking for trouble there.

I will return to the motion by commending Mr Ramsay on his efforts, and I look forward to this motion passing. At the election of the coalition government in November 2018, I look forward to these services Mr Ramsay has asked for being delivered.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — I have been listening to a little bit of this debate in my office. In fact I do not think I have missed much of it.

Mr Dalidakis — You poor thing! You need a whisky.

Ms SYMES — I know! It is punishment for my sins, Mr Dalidakis.

From the outset I will say that, if nothing else, the Liberals are consistent. They show an increased interest in a community when there is a job at stake. Sadly for the communities of the south-west they were not the beneficiaries of Liberal Party interest when they had Liberal government members elected to represent them. From the four years of the previous Liberal-Nationals coalition government there is no evidence — and I can assure members that I have tried to seek it out — of improvements being made to the Warrnambool line.

Mr Ramsay — Have you been on it?

Ms SYMES — No, I declare I have never travelled on the Warrnambool line. I speak quite regularly to Mr Purcell, who — —

Mr Finn — Have you been to the pub at Dunkeld?

Ms SYMES — I have been to the pub at Dunkeld.

Mr Finn — You had the state conference there, didn't you?

Ms SYMES — A couple of years ago, yes. Mr Purcell regularly tells me about his experiences on the Warrnambool line, and I know that Thursday finishing time is of interest to his family and friends back home because sometimes he gets there and sometimes he does not, depending on what time we rise. I must say that unlike many members in the house, he is quite relaxed about our finishing time on a Thursday. I think he has got the most at stake, but he never hassles either of the whips about the finishing time on a Thursday; I must acknowledge that.

I have also heard quite a bit about the Warrnambool line in my meetings with RTAG, the Regional Transport Advisory Group. We have been equipped to travel around the state and consult with communities on the development of the regional network development plan, which is basically a short, medium and long-term plan for transport for our country people. I will refer to one of the things that comes up about Warrnambool that I have heard firsthand. I do say that I have not been on the Warrnambool line; I generally head north as opposed to west. What I do know about that rail line, however, is that if you go from Melbourne, you go to Warrnambool and you pass through a couple of electorates along the way, and a couple of those, which I am sure Mr Ramsay is a bit more familiar with than I am, are the seats of South-West Coast and Polwarth. They are lovely parts of the state, absolutely. I have spent a bit of time in Polwarth. The thing those two electorates have in common is that their members have both recently retired and we are facing by-elections, which is, I think, a bit of the motivation for today's motion.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms SYMES — I am just going to say 'I think'; I will leave it there. What I find interesting is that this motion has been raised at a time when we have a pending by-election, whereas one would have thought that if the Liberals really cared about this railway line, and given they had a local Premier and a local minister responsible for the specific portfolio that is the topic of

our debate on rail today, and if it had been a priority, we would have seen some action in the four years of the previous government. Those two people had pretty influential roles, and those two people were in the electorates this rail line passes through and indeed where it ends.

I sought to review a little bit of the history, and I found that in June last year Mr Mulder, the former member for Polwarth and the former Minister for Public Transport, was talking down the idea of an additional service on the Warrnambool line, telling the *Warrnambool Standard* that for that to happen — —

Mr Davis — Did you do this research or did you get someone to give it to you?

Ms SYMES — I did. It is called Google.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms SYMES — It comes up in the *Warrnambool Standard*. Google brings you to the *Warrnambool Standard*, and then you can read the *Warrnambool Standard*'s prior editions. What you find there is a quote from the former member for Polwarth that says, in relation to an additional service:

... for that to happen, we need to be sure there will be patronage and there is a very specific science PTV use to determine the demand for services.

And further:

It's not as easy as what the Greens say. You can't just increase services by 50 per cent. There needs to be the demand. No-one wants to see empty trains running along a railway line.

This was in June 2014. Then in the lead-up to the 2014 election — just a couple of months after that — we had a promise from the Liberal government of an additional return rail service on the Warrnambool line.

Mr Davis — Do you support it?

Ms SYMES — There is great merit in an additional service on the Warrnambool line. I certainly would not deny that.

Mr Davis — So are you going to support it?

Ms SYMES — The motion? I am not supporting a motion that condemns a government for not doing something in 10 months that your government did not do in the last four years, especially when you had the Premier and Minister for Public Transport in those seats.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Through the Chair.

Ms SYMES — Sorry, Deputy President. I think I will just come back to how I started my contribution. It is unsurprising that we have a whiff of a by-election, with once again Liberal members' jobs at stake — they are on the line — and those opposite are falling over themselves to convince the south-west that they care more about the people who live there than The Nationals.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms SYMES — Are you having a conversation with me or with each other?

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms SYMES — Good.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Through the Chair.

Ms SYMES — Sorry, Deputy President. I have heard through my office the claims those opposite have made — that they are wanting to stand up for regional Victoria. Their attitude is: 'We're trying to force the hand of the government to do something that we should have done, and we're pretending it's not a big deal that we didn't do it, so let's try and pretend that we were going to do it and we'll try to force the government's hand'. It is not, however, so much about words; it is about actions. The history speaks for itself. The former government gutted \$73 million from V/Line over three years. I understand — and I think this has been confirmed by every speaker today — that no additional extra weekday service for Warrnambool was added in the four years those opposite were in office. They simply did not bother to create a long-term plan for regional public transport. It is quite hard to comprehend that no regional plan was created when those opposite had the Premier and the Minister for Public Transport both from regional Victoria. I would have thought regional Victoria would be where some of their priorities would have been.

The lack of a strategy for public transport in the short, medium and long term under the former government has really held rural and regional Victoria back for too long.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Ramsay has already made his contribution, and I am sure he will have a right of reply.

Ms SYMES — I believe a motion on country roads and bridges is on the notice paper for debate a little bit later this afternoon.

Mr Ramsay — I am looking forward to that one.

Ms SYMES — I think we are too.

In addition to the impact of four years of inaction on the Warrnambool line, the lack of funding resulted in several problems being created across the state. There were lots of unplanned service disruptions due to high rates of system failure and a decrease in reliability. There were temporary speed or load restrictions due to the condition of tracks and structures, greater maintenance costs as the rate of degradation accelerated and deteriorating network performance that would not support long-term patronage growth.

In contrast — and this is something I have recently and quite proudly been involved in — the Andrews Labor government knows that regional transport is a priority not just prior to an election or by-election. I am pleased to be part of the regional network development plan, which will be Victoria's first-ever long-term plan for improving public transport in regional Victoria. I am a member of the regional transport advisory group, and I am joined by many highly talented and well-versed individuals in the area of regional development, including Bruce Anson, longstanding CEO of Warrnambool City Council, who I confirm is a huge advocate for an additional service on this line. He has raised it at every meeting I have attended with him. I can also confirm that an extra service on the Warrnambool line is being looked at as part of the regional network development plan.

As I alluded to before, we have engaged in a lot of consultation across the state. Almost 300 people from Warrnambool, Torquay, Geelong, Portland and surrounding areas have attended community and stakeholder workshops. A range of improvements have been raised by these communities regarding not only the frequency of train services between Melbourne and Geelong but also how to make fares and ticketing simpler and passenger experiences on V/Line trains better.

In its 11 months in government the Andrews Labor government has invested in 21 extra V/Line carriages, which has increased the number of services on the regional network by 30 per cent. Its first state budget included regional funding commitments in public transport of at least \$554 million, and that included new regional rail carriages and infrastructure and \$50 million for safer country railway crossings right

across Victoria. The no. 1 priority at country crossings is safety, but it is also about the speed and frequency of trains. If we do not have adequate signage and safety at crossings, trains are forced to slow down when they are going past those points. If we get those right, we get better services for those who are on the train, not just for those who are crossing the tracks.

There is also \$2 million for the Bendigo metro rail project, which has been warmly welcomed in that community. There is \$90 million for five new X'tropolis trains, which is not only delivering great outcomes for transport policy but is also delivering manufacturing jobs in Ballarat. There is \$75 million for maintenance and refurbishment to extend the life of the current Comeng train fleet, which is also adding to new jobs in Ballarat.

Although I am happy to contribute to debates in this place on public transport, I have got to say that I am more interested in getting on with the job of improving transport services for country Victorians. As such I am very much looking forward to my next regional transport advisory group meeting, which is this Friday, as we are approaching the pointy end of our preparation of material for the minister. That material will go to her by the end of the year.

With that said, if it was not clear, I am not supporting today's motion.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to say a few words in support of the motion moved by Mr Ramsay, and in particular in reference to the by-elections that are currently underway in the Polwarth and South-West Coast electorates. As part of the shadow cabinet I was privileged to spend time in Polwarth electorate in particular and to also visit a township on behalf of the Liberal candidate, Richard Riordan. I subsequently met Mr Riordan, a third-generation Colac boy. He was born and bred in Colac and has run a business in Colac for many decades. He is well known and well regarded, and hopefully he will make a terrific member of Parliament. Likewise Roma Britnell, the Liberal candidate for South-West Coast, brings a lot of commendable attributes. I look forward to working with her and Mr Riordan. The comments that were made —

Ms Symes — Are you going to table their CVs?

Mrs PEULICH — Ms Symes interjects, but I note that Labor does not have candidates in those two seats. Clearly it is concerned about the whacking that voters would give it on a very disappointing 10 months in government and also in terms of its commitment to

country and rural Victoria. I commend Mr Ramsay, as does Mr Riordan, on the motion condemning the Andrews government for not supporting an additional daily rail service on the Warrnambool to Geelong line, noting the Geelong to Melbourne peak rail services are overcrowded, unreliable and suffer regular delays, noting the many complaints made by the regional network community forums and calling on the Andrews government to make the necessary changes and introduce a fourth daily service to meet the needs of train passengers using the Warrnambool line.

I make the following comments on behalf of Mr Riordan. The Andrews government changed the timetable — which was certainly commented on extensively in the township I visited and in which I doorknocked businesses — without even consulting V/Line staff, let alone V/Line travellers. That is the way that Labor does business. V/Line staff are as wild as the public about this particular issue. The other interesting observation was that the Melbourne to Warrnambool and Warrnambool to Melbourne train service is now slower than when it was run by West Coast Railway. West Coast Railway operated between 1993 and 2004. Travel on the Warrnambool line now takes 11 minutes longer one way and 25 minutes longer the other way. I think that is extraordinary. That is not going forward; that is going backwards. Labor has obviously stuffed up the timetable.

Perhaps Labor has been distracted by its internal factional wrangling. Labor pays lip-service to rural and country Victoria, but clearly it cannot run a candidate in the upcoming by-elections for the Assembly seats of Polwarth and South-West Coast, let alone endorse and support an additional rail service which would mean an extra service per day and six additional services per week for Colac, Camperdown, Winchelsea and Terang. From the point of view of the Polwarth electorate, the Liberal candidate, Richard Riordan, welcomes the commitment from the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Matthew Guy, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, David Hodgett. Apparently this has been extremely well received by the Polwarth constituency. I imagine there would have been similar endorsements to the South-West Coast electorate.

The constituents of and the Liberal candidate for Polwarth are disappointed that rural Victoria is going backwards under Labor. It is certainly going backwards in the west of the west — off the West Gate Bridge — thanks to Andrews and company. If it is the will of the voters and Mr Riordan is elected, he is looking forward to the opportunity of being a strong voice for Polwarth, just as Roma Britnell, the Liberal candidate for

South-West Coast is looking forward to being a strong voice for that region. These potential members would ensure that these areas get the services they need. The electorate does not ask for much; it is a very enterprising and self-reliant community.

These constituents are seeking basic infrastructure; they are not clamouring for additional things. They are seeking basic infrastructure and services, things that they cannot provide for themselves. Otherwise, they do a darn good job of providing for themselves and their communities. The strength of the volunteer groups in these country towns is quite amazing. Richard Riordan is a candidate of the highest calibre, and I am sure that he will serve the Polwarth electorate extremely well if he is elected on election day, as will Roma Britnell in South-West Coast. I also look forward to making a few comments during the debate on the next motion.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — In making some closing comments on this motion, I firstly thank all those who have contributed to the debate this afternoon. I understand that the Greens have supported the motion and that they see the importance of this additional rail service. I note that Mr Purcell also indicated his support, as did Ms Patten and members of The Nationals and the Liberal Party.

I am disappointed that Labor Party members have indicated they do not support the motion, which in essence calls for an additional rail service to Warrnambool. I also note that much of the debate was around who did what under the previous government. If members remember, there was a succession of investments made in rail infrastructure in regional Victoria over the term of the coalition government.

There was a sequence of events leading up to this additional rail service for travellers to Warrnambool, which the coalition initiated and planned. The regional rail link was introduced and implemented, and that provided greater capacity on rail for passengers. Greater flexibility and timetabling was provided for those wanting to use that service, particularly in terms of the dedicated tracks from Ballarat to Geelong. That project also resulted in services to Geelong being increased so that there was a service every 20 minutes. That allowed the next phase of the rollout to be introduced, which was the passing loop at Warncoort. That was only recently completed, and it is critical to providing the fourth daily service to Warrnambool.

I am very disappointed that it is only the Labor Party at this point that has indicated it is not willing to support the additional rail service. I thank the contributors to the debate on this motion who have indicated that they see

a need to support the growth of the towns that are serviced by that rail link. I also note Mr Barber's comments about the required additional coach services. As part of my shadow parliamentary secretary portfolio, it is certainly something we are looking at. We wish to improve the coach services in areas that do not have access to rail and require connection. I thank those who have contributed, and note once again that the Labor Party has indicated it will not support the additional service at this stage.

Motion agreed to.

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Reference

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house, pursuant to section 33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, requires the Electoral Matters Committee to inquire into, consider and report no later than 1 August 2016 on —

- (1) whether the Electoral Act 2002 and/or the Local Government Act 1989 should be amended to create a system of political donations disclosure and/or restrictions on political donations; and
- (2) the outcomes of similar legislative reforms introduced in other relevant jurisdictions, particularly in the last six years.

I move this motion because it is now six and a half years since April 2009 when a similar report was tabled from the Electoral Matters Committee concerning its inquiry into political donations and disclosure. That was a reference from the Legislative Council, in fact based on a motion moved by my colleague Mr Barber. He moved in the Legislative Council on 16 April 2008:

That this house requires the Electoral Matters Committee to inquire, consider and report no later than 30 April 2009 on —

- (1) whether the Electoral Act 2002 should be amended to create a system of political donations disclosure and/or restrictions on political donations; and
- (2) the outcome resulting from similar legislative reforms introduced in Canada, the United Kingdom and other relevant jurisdictions.

Deputy President, you will notice there is a similarity between the wording of the two motions, and hence the wording of the terms of reference that went to the Electoral Matters Committee in 2008. Of course if this motion were supported today, it would go back to that committee six and a half years after Mr Barber's original motion. In fact it will be seven and a half years

after the original motion was carried; the report was tabled a year later than that.

A lot of changes have happened with regard to electoral finance reform around Australia and the world, and the issue of electoral political donations has become heightened in the community in that time as a result of inquiries, particularly the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) inquiry in New South Wales and other inquiries and scandals involving political donations and influence on politicians at the federal and particularly state and local government levels.

On 16 April 2008, when speaking on a motion he had moved concerning political donations, Mr Barber stated:

If members believe that the current system as it operates under Victorian law is perfect, then I guess they will not support this motion. However, I know that across this Parliament on all sides of politics there are individuals with particular concerns about this issue ... and there are many people who, regardless of their political positions on a range of issues, believe that donations to political parties and the associated involvement of money in elections is an important consideration in creating a level playing field for democracy to operate.

Nothing much has changed in that regard except that perhaps community interest and concern about the role of political donations in election campaigns and outside of them has heightened. I have raised the issue of political donations several times in Parliament. For example, through a motion on 25 November 2009, in the wake of the April 2009 report of the Electoral Matters Committee, I moved a motion to introduce reforms, to ban corporate donations and to limit individual donations, based I might say on the information that was contained in the report of the Electoral Matters Committee of April 2009. The report has a wealth of information on the situation in 2009 with regard to the systems in other states and territories around Australia and similar overseas jurisdictions, including Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Electoral Matters Committee embarked on an international tour to examine electoral finance systems in those overseas jurisdictions. I do not propose that the committee embark upon another international tour. It should be able to update itself on developments in other jurisdictions from afar via the internet or Skype, for example, which probably was not available in 2008–09 but certainly is now.

On 14 April 2010 I moved a motion in this house that parties refrain from accepting donations from property

developers in the lead-up to the election that year. I moved that motion because at the time there was a lot of consternation in the community about the role that donations from property developers was playing in terms of decisions made about development at both local and state levels. In March 2014 I moved a motion about the apparent direct link between a donation to the Liberal Party and the Minister for Planning overriding the Stonnington planning scheme, and changes to the development in favour of that particular property developer made by the former Minister for Planning. In May last year I moved a similar motion to the 2010 motion — that parties refrain from accepting donations from developers and from entities that are regulated by government, and to look at limiting donations and campaign expenditure as has been done in comparable jurisdictions.

I mentioned the changes in the laws of various jurisdictions and the problems with associated entities which were allegedly ‘rinsing’ campaign donations. That is a new term that came to light through the ICAC inquiries, that through entities such as Progressive Business, the Fortune 500 club, ICAC identified sham associations that had been established with the sole purpose of what ICAC called ‘rinsing’ donations to political parties and candidates. People will recall that only last year several ministers in New South Wales were forced to resign from parliament, so we are talking about serious matters. The community has seen a procession of these matters arising almost every month on these issues, and that is why I say the community concern has heightened in the six years since the report from the Electoral Matters Committee.

During the motion in May last year I spoke about potential, perceived and real conflicts of interest regarding political donations, I spoke about calls for the need to dampen down the perceived need for money in election campaigns because any examination of the summary of — —

Mr Davis — On a point of order, Deputy President, and with the greatest of respect to Ms Pennicuik, going back to that previous vote on the motion just a moment ago, I direct your attention to chapter 16 of the standing orders. I raised this as soon as I became aware of it and was able to follow this sequence through. Chapter 16.01 headed ‘Resolving a question’ states:

When a question is proposed to the Council by the President, the President will state whether in his or her opinion, the “Ayes” or “Noes” (as the case may be) have it. If a member challenges the Chair’s opinion the question must be resolved by a division.

It is my recollection that, perhaps through happenstance, the way you phrased the end of that motion was not entirely consistent with standing order 16.01, and it may have led to a moment’s confusion for either the ayes or the noes as to whether a division could be called or should be called. I do not necessarily need you to rule on this now, Deputy President, it might be something that the President and the Clerk need to confer on, but I do want to draw it to the chamber’s attention and seek clarification of that as a point of order.

Mr Elasmarr — On the point of order, Deputy President, I am not challenging what Mr Davis is saying, but when you put the call, ayes were first and then you put the noes, which was correct. My understanding was that you understood the ayes were more than the noes and that is why you went with the ayes, and we did not challenge it. I am not disputing the rule; that is just for information.

Mr Davis — Further on the point of order, sometimes in these sequences it is just a little hard to hear clearly, and it might be that there was some confusion, but the standing order is actually quite clear — ayes and noes — and the President indicates whether the ayes or the noes have it. That does not appear to me to have occurred exactly in that sequence this time, and it might be that the record needs — —

Mr Jennings — Are you questioning whether the ayes had it? Is that what you are questioning?

Mr Davis — That is what I am questioning.

Mr Jennings — The ayes had it. That was what was called.

Mr Davis — That was what was called — not in that exact phrase, though. This was a deviation from the normal phraseology, a different phraseology, and I make the point quite clearly that this appears to be somewhat different from the normal practice. If we appear to be introducing a slightly unusual practice or a different practice, we should do so in the full knowledge of what we are doing. As I said, it might be that the President and the Clerk wish to look at the transcript to be definitive about it.

Mr Jennings — You want a division on every question.

Mr Davis — No, I did not say that. That is not what I am saying.

Mr Jennings — That is the implication.

Mr Davis — It is not at all. This is a new set of words that has been used, and this may just be an error.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I am very clear in my own mind about the way that vote was conducted, but I am cognisant of the political environment we are in in terms of a by-election so I am going to refer the matter to the President.

Mr Davis — I am appreciative, Deputy President.

Ms PENNICUIK — I might restart the point I was on before the interruption. I was talking about the motion I moved in May last year. In debate on that motion I spoke about calls by commentators, academics et cetera who make it their business to analyse and study this area to dampen down the perceived need for escalating amounts of money in election campaigns. If one looks at the Australian Electoral Commission website and the amount of money donated to all political parties, one will see since the 2009 inquiry — and it was also reported in that inquiry — the rise in the amount of money that is being expended on election campaigns from year to year. That is a theme that is of concern around the world, particularly in the United States where commentators are making the observation that it is virtually impossible for an ordinary person to run for the office of governor, for example, and in particular the office of president, because of the cost of doing so.

I also spoke about issues with local government where way too many councillors have to absent themselves from planning decisions due to conflicts of interest arising from donations they have accepted, particularly from property developers. That is why I have included in my motion a reference to the Local Government Act 1989 as something the committee could look at in terms of whether it needs amending.

In speaking on my motion last year I referred to the Australian Study of Parliament Group seminar that was held in 2010 at which the guest speaker was Associate Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, who has made a great study of political donations around the world, particularly around Australia. He said the system of donations produced undue influence at best and corruption at worst. He did not necessarily mean corruption in terms of individuals but certainly in terms of corrupting the political process and making it unfair in terms of the access and influence of business pitted against the interests of the ordinary citizen and the public interest.

I mentioned the report tabled in 2009. One of the opening statements in the chair's foreword to the report is:

Victoria, along with the commonwealth, is amongst the least regulated jurisdictions in the Western world in terms of political finance law.

Nothing has changed in that regard since the tabling of this report. In fact there are very few recommendations in the report. I note that the former chair of the committee is here, and I think he is going to make a contribution to the debate on this motion.

There are three recommendations, the first of which is:

The Victorian and commonwealth governments consider how best to harmonise political finance laws to ensure a uniform and consistent approach.

While that is a worthy recommendation, there has been no progress on it at the commonwealth or Victorian levels. As I mentioned earlier, most of the other states and territories have moved quite substantially in this area, and I will provide detail on that a little later in my contribution.

The other two recommendations relate to the caps on political donations in the light of changes to the structure of electronic gaming machines to make sure that the provisions regarding disclosure that apply to parties that are registered federally also apply to Independent candidates for political parties in Victoria.

They were the only recommendations in the report. I was critical of the flavour of that particular part of the report when I moved the motion at the end of 2009. Basically it said, 'Let's not do anything until something is done at the national level'. Nothing has happened, and I think it is timely six and a half years later to go back and have a look at what has developed around the jurisdictions in Australia, what has not happened in Victoria and why we are lagging even further behind. As we default to the commonwealth system, very little in the way of regulation on political donations applies in Victoria. That was disappointing in terms of the recommendations. However, the issue of the influence of political donations has gained more public interest over the last six years.

As I mentioned earlier, this is a very good report in terms of the wealth of information it provides on the system that operated at the time. In some ways it has changed and in some ways it has not. For example, at page 2 of the report it says the key issues raised by inquiry participants in relation to donations, disclosure and restrictions were: what is the definition of a political donation, what are the sources and types of

those donations, issues around bans or caps on political donations, consistency of disclosure provisions, political donation disclosure thresholds and the timeliness of reporting obligations. Those issues are detailed throughout the report.

Also, as I mentioned, the committee undertook an international study tour and tabled the *Report on International Investigations into Political Donations and Disclosure and Voter Participation and Informal Voting* before tabling its final report. That is also a very worthwhile report in acquainting us with what goes on around the rest of the world. In fact in the 2009 report there are tables that outline what the situation was in the UK, Canada, New Zealand and the US.

Some other interesting things that I have noted in the report are at page 9, which is the background to the inquiry. It says:

The committee was informed of numerous examples of former and current politicians and political administrators who, in the past, expressed discontent and concern regarding the current political financing situation in Australia ...

It is quite interesting to read now the names of some of those people. They include Mr Eric Roozendaal, Mr Mark Arbib, the Honourable Morris Iemma, Mr Malcolm Turnbull, Dr Carmen Lawrence and Mr Andrew Murray, a former Australian Democrats Senator.

At page 11, paragraph 2.13 of the report says:

The relationship between political donations, government contracts, fundraising and political parties has also been contentious in state and federal politics. There have been allegations in the media that through political donations, individual MPs may become lobbyists for an individual, patron developer, union or industry group. It has also been alleged that political parties favour businesses who host or attend functions by associated entities (business arm of political parties).

I mentioned that before as being a particular issue that we need to look at.

A bit of a theme in the committee's report that pops up a couple of times is the observation that Victoria has not suffered the major scandals that perhaps New South Wales and Queensland have and that therefore no reform is needed. One of the comments at page 17, in paragraph 2.35, is that:

While Victoria arguably has not suffered a major political finance scandal, the scandals which have taken place in other jurisdictions combined with the increased scrutiny by the media, members of Parliament and parliamentary committees have seen the issue of political donations enter and remain in the public domain.

As I said, that has only increased.

At page 18, paragraph 2.42 states:

Several inquiry participants indicated that Victoria should adopt an approach independent of the commonwealth if a uniform approach did not offer greater transparency. For example, Mr David Kerslake urged the committee to 'go with a separate scheme if the commonwealth's [disclosure] level was very high'.

The commonwealth's disclosure level is very high. It stands at over \$13 000 per donor now — about \$13 100. Any donation under that amount does not have to be disclosed, and that is the situation in Victoria because Victoria defaults to the commonwealth system and does not have its own separate system of disclosure.

It is worth going through the distinctions between the federal system and those in the states and territories in Australia. As I mentioned, donations up to \$13 000 do not have to be disclosed now. That will be the amount up until June next year because the disclosure amount rises with CPI. In the federal system there is no cap on maximum donations and there is no restriction on donors. That is the situation in Victoria except that donations from casino and gaming licence-holders are capped at \$50 000.

One would have to query why casino and gaming licence-holders should be donating to political parties at all, particularly to those parties who may be in government because, as I raised in my motion last year with regard to entities that are regulated by government or whose activities can be influenced by government decisions, the government party should not be accepting donations from those entities at all because there is an obvious conflict of interest. Even if there is no obvious conflict of interest, there is at least a potential or perceived conflict of interest.

In the debate last year I mentioned that both of the major parties, the Labor and Liberal parties, had accepted donations from, for example, utilities — energy companies — and I noticed just in the last few weeks that AGL has announced that it will not be making any further donations to political parties for, I think, the very reason I raised in debate, because it is a conflict of interest to do so. In fact some of this is being led by companies which are taking the decision now not to donate to political parties where they might get themselves involved in that perceived conflict of interest.

That is the situation in the commonwealth and Victoria, which as I said before have been described as having the most unregulated systems in the Western world. We

note that in New South Wales donations above \$1000 or multiple donations from a single person or group that total over \$1000 must be disclosed. Tickets or prizes of \$1000 for fundraising must also be disclosed. Donations are capped at \$5000 or \$2000 for individual candidates. Some entities, such as property developers, are banned. The tobacco, gaming and liquor industries are banned, and there is a ban on donations from unenrolled individuals or entities without an Australian business number. In Western Australia gifts and other income above \$2100 must be disclosed and there is a cap of \$2100 for anonymous donations.

In the Northern Territory gifts over \$1500 must be disclosed, and donations of \$200 or more to a candidate or \$1500 or more to a party must be disclosed. In the ACT donations over \$1000 must be disclosed. The \$10 000 cap was recently removed, but there is a cap of \$1000 on anonymous donations and a cap of \$25 000 per party per year for anonymous donations. In Queensland donations over \$1000 must be disclosed, scaled down from \$12 000 that was introduced by the Campbell Newman government, and that is retrospective to 2013. Donations are capped at \$2000 to individuals and \$5000 to parties. Donations of foreign property are prohibited, and a new six-month reporting of donations instead of annually has been introduced in Queensland. Tasmania and South Australia both follow the federal laws, but changes are being looked at in those jurisdictions as well.

If one was to summarise, one could say that in the major jurisdictions of New South Wales, West Australia, ACT, Northern Territory and Queensland, all donations over \$1000 have to be disclosed. In Victoria it is a donation of over \$13 000 per person, and that situation needs fixing.

Paragraph 3.5 on page 21 of the report tabled in 2009 states:

There is no accurate record of all political donations received by political parties and candidates in Victoria —

because —

Victoria ‘piggybacks’ on the commonwealth disclosure scheme, which requires only federally registered political parties in Victoria to disclose all political donations received ... Independent candidates and political parties registered only in Victoria are not required to comply with any disclosure laws.

Pages 30 to 50 of the report look at restricting political donations and go to a lot of subjects. I am going to read out the subject headings because they give an idea of the sorts of things that need to be considered and which the report did consider and report on — that is,

donations from individual citizens, holders of gaming licences, property developers, government contractors, anonymous donors, foreign donors, tobacco industry, third parties and associated entities, corporations and trade unions, party membership and affiliations, cash donations, attendance charges, intra-party transfers, voluntary labour and government contractors. Two of the participants in the inquiry, Dr Ken Coghill and Dr Joo-Cheong Tham, at paragraph 3.58 on page 35 noted that:

There is no evidence that ... corrupt processes occur under the current Victorian government ... the huge sums involved in government contracts for goods and services provide massive incentives for prospective suppliers to attempt to influence decisions on awarding those contracts.

As I said, there is certainly the potential for a perceived conflict of interest.

Some of the other issues covered in the report, and those not necessarily covered in the report but which have emerged since, include, for example, foreign donors. The Australian Electoral Commission’s register shows that the Liberal Party received a \$250 000 donation from a person living in the United Kingdom. I note that it is illegal in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada for parties to receive donations from foreign residents or foreign corporations. That is interesting and the ramifications of allowing that should be looked at more closely.

Total spending in financial years over the last elections has been increasing, rising from a combined total of \$33 million in 1999 to nearly \$59 million in 2004–05, and it has escalated even more since then. While it is true that there have been no major scandals, it is not true that there have not been any concerns in Victoria with regard to the influence of political donations. There have been concerns in Victoria and there have been problems around the country. But it should not rest on whether there has been a scandal; the issue is about greater transparency and accountability with regard to political donations. As I pointed out, Victoria lags behind all the other states and territories in this regard.

One commentator on the 2009 report said that the issue is not only about capping the amount of donations but about the disclosure of those donations. All the jurisdictions need to move towards more timely disclosure of donations. It takes 18 months after an election for the people of Victoria to find out what donations of more than \$13 000 were made to political parties, but they will never know about any donations made under that threshold unless they are disclosed by the particular parties or candidates. Victorians want and

deserve greater transparency and accountability regarding political donations. It is time that Victoria reformed its legislation and came more into line with other jurisdictions around the country, particularly as there has not been any movement at the commonwealth level. That has not stopped the other states and territories from becoming more open and transparent with regard to political donations.

My motion asks the parliamentary committee to consider changes in other jurisdictions over the past six years and how the Victorian law can be improved. New South Wales is having ongoing inquiries into its donation system, including one involving a panel of experts last year.

This morning the government gave a reference to the Electoral Matters Committee — by coincidence, perhaps — in regard to electronic voting. While that is a worthwhile issue, I would regard it as being not as urgent as the long-overdue reforms in the area of political donations. The timing of my motion would mean that the inquiry was being carried out in a year far removed from an election year — that is, it would be reporting two years before a state election year. That is another reason why it is timely and urgent that the motion is passed and referred to the Electoral Matters Committee on behalf the people of Victoria.

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the motion before the house concerning political donations disclosure and/or restrictions on political donations, otherwise referred to in electoral matters circles as campaign finance law reform. The government will not be supporting this motion for the reasons I will outline later in my contribution.

In speaking to this motion I will first address paragraph (2), which requires the Electoral Matters Committee (EMC) to report on:

... the outcomes of similar legislative reforms introduced in other relevant jurisdictions, particularly in the last six years.

I note Ms Pennicuik took us through the evolution of campaign finance reform over the last six years. I will expand on that and look at it from a more global perspective as well, starting with Canada.

Prior to legislative changes to campaign finance regulations in New South Wales and Queensland, Australian jurisdictions were some of the least regulated amongst Western nations. The commonwealth scheme remains less regulated than those of New South Wales and Queensland and is used

by Victoria in the absence of our own campaign finance regulation regime.

I suspect part of the reason this motion requires the EMC to report on reforms in similar jurisdictions in the last six years is that until recently campaign finance law was considered a rather esoteric political issue, the preserve of a small number of academics and scholars. It has now moved beyond academia, as evidenced by the increasing demand from the wider community for greater transparency and accountability in its institutions, including political parties. That has in turn produced more scholarly output and, as a result, greater media focus and attention.

The campaign finance law reform agenda can be traced back to Canada in 2004 and 2006, after a major political funding scandal precipitated sweeping national reforms and caused other countries, such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Australia, to consider similar actions within their own jurisdictions. The key features of the Canadian reforms were as follows: capping expenditure of political parties and candidates; banning donations from corporations, trade unions and other unincorporated associations; capping donations from individuals; and introducing a comprehensive public funding regime to compensate. People who are involved with electoral matters refer to the Canadian model as the maximalist model in terms of reform.

Ms Pennicuik — The gold standard.

Mr SOMYUREK — The gold standard, as Ms Pennicuik says. In contrast to Canada, New Zealand's campaign finance regulation opted to manage demands only by capping expenditure of political parties, candidates and third parties. This strategy can be useful, and has been useful, in preventing election campaign costs from escalating rapidly — a so-called arms race. The New Zealand system seems to do this without generating constitutional and administrative issues.

In the United Kingdom there have been two major inquiries into the matter of campaign finance reform post the Canadian reforms, but no legislative change of significance. The first, a government-commissioned report in 2006, recommended the capping of donations and expenses. The second, a Ministry of Justice white paper in 2008, proposed to limit spending by parties and candidates, improve disclosure regimes for donations and strengthen the powers of the Electoral Commission in the UK.

In Australia the issue of campaign finance reform was put on the national agenda by Kevin Rudd after he assumed the prime ministership in 2007. Former Prime Minister Rudd was a strong advocate for campaign finance reform. He stated in 2008 that Australia ran the risk of becoming a democracy 'up for sale' if the rules were not changed. The issue gained further momentum and bipartisan support when Malcolm Turnbull assumed the leadership of the Liberal Party in 2008. That was a golden period for campaign finance reform in Australian politics, when we had two national leaders, Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull, advocating for significant reform of the system. We are now waiting to see whether Prime Minister Turnbull pursues a similar agenda. Mr Turnbull's positioning is critical for reform, as the Victorian government supports the harmonisation of our campaign finance system.

In March 2008 the Rudd government started the process of reform with the green paper process entitled *Australian Government Electoral Reform Green Paper — Donations, Funding and Expenditure*. On 15 May 2008 the Rudd government introduced into the Senate the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2008. The bill was subsequently referred to the commonwealth Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM), which subsequently referred the bill back to the government with two changes.

Ms Pennicuik said that nothing has happened in this space. I go through all this to show that there was a will by our party to effect change in this area, but it was thwarted at a national level. After the government incorporated the JSCEM recommendations and reintroduced the bill, it was rejected a second time on 11 March 2009. On 20 October 2010 a revised bill, the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010, was introduced into the House of Representatives. Although the bill subsequently passed the House of Representatives, it did not pass the Senate. That was pretty much the end of Australia's campaign finance reform.

There was a big chance for Australia in 2008, when Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull led their parties, to reform its campaign finance laws. Again I state to the Greens — and to Ms Pennicuik in particular — that whilst the recommendations from the Electoral Matters Committee in 2009 were for harmonisation, there was great expectancy that with Mr Rudd as Prime Minister and Mr Turnbull as Leader of the Opposition, change was imminent. Unfortunately history shows that that

change never happened; however, it was not due to a lack of will on the Australian Labor Party's side.

The experience of New South Wales, similar to that of Canada, was propelled by donations-related scandals that involved allegations of wrongdoing by prominent figures in the New South Wales political system, which forced the government to proceed with reform before the conclusion of the commonwealth process. New South Wales wanted to sit it out and wait. It was also in favour of national harmony with respect to these issues, but there were compelling circumstances at play which meant it had to act. Seeing that nothing was happening in Canberra by 2010, act it did, and it went it alone. In November 2010 the New South Wales Labor government adopted some of the key recommendations of the New South Wales electoral matters committee's report and introduced legislation in the Electoral Funding and Disclosures Amendment Bill 2010, which drastically reduced the demand for and supply of private campaign funding by adopting a version of the maximalist Canadian model.

On 9 September 2008 the Queensland Parliament passed the Electoral Amendment Act 2008. This legislation implemented a number of reforms, which included — and Ms Pennicuik made reference to these in her speech — reducing disclosure thresholds to \$1000; introducing twice-yearly disclosures; banning foreign-sourced donations; verifying candidate electoral spending; and reporting donations within 14 days each time donations from a single donor reach \$100 000 within a six-month period.

In August 2009 the Queensland government released a discussion paper entitled *Integrity and Accountability in Queensland*, in which it expressed its frustration at the lack of progress being made by the commonwealth. The Queensland government, like the New South Wales and Victorian governments, strongly supported harmony, but it was frustrated with the slow pace of reform in Canberra because of the then federal opposition's refusal to support campaign finance reform.

As no commonwealth legislation had yet passed its Parliament, in December 2010 the Queensland government released a white paper advocating reform of the Queensland electoral system. Based on that white paper process the Electoral Reform and Accountability Amendment Bill 2011 was formulated and subsequently introduced into Parliament in April 2011. The Queensland reforms are very similar to the New South Wales model. Again it takes a maximalist approach. As I said previously, the New South Wales model is in turn similar to the Canadian model.

On 16 April 2008 the Victorian Legislative Council moved a motion requiring the Victorian Electoral Matters Committee to inquire into whether the Electoral Act 2002 should be amended to create a system of political donation disclosure and/or restrictions on political donations, and the outcome resulting from similar legislative reforms introduced in Canada, the United Kingdom and other relevant jurisdictions. As I recall, terms of reference were put up by — —

Ms Pennicuik — Mr Barber.

Mr SOMYUREK — Mr Barber, yes. The Victorian Electoral Matters Committee tabled its report to Parliament in April 2009. It found that due to the potential jurisdictional and constitutional issues that would originate from the federal governance structure it was preferable that changed electoral laws be in accord. As the process was also running concurrently with the commonwealth proceedings, the Victorian Electoral Matters Committee made the recommendation to wait for the outcome of the federal process. That was not too dissimilar to what New South Wales and Queensland had done at the time. So at that stage, in 2008–09, when Mr Rudd and Mr Turnbull were on board for reform, Queensland and New South Wales were also waiting to see what was going to happen in Canberra. They were frustrated by the lack of progress federally, so then they reformed.

I can tell Ms Pennicuik we were going through a similar process here in Victoria. There was an air of expectancy of reform nationally, so it would have been a folly for us to have embarked on reform on our own whilst there was this big bipartisan push from Canberra for reform in this space. That is why we decided not to act at that stage. Unfortunately by November 2010 the Labor Party was out of office.

Since 2008 all Australian jurisdictions have either introduced legislation into Parliament or held inquiries into aspects of their campaign finance laws, reflecting the gathering momentum on the issue.

Campaign finance law is a very serious issue in contemporary politics. With modern political campaign techniques requiring vast sums of money the corollary of this is a sort of funding arms race between the political parties, as each political party tries to outfundraise and ultimately outspend the other in the legitimate belief, which used to be contested, that they could buy themselves a seat. This has been especially so since the advent of the Palmer United Party, which, by splashing millions of dollars, effectively bought itself seats in Parliament. I do not think there are too many people — whether they be academics, scholars,

experts or boffins — operating in the electoral matters space now who contest whether or not having money equals more votes; it definitely does.

The arms race obviously then puts pressure on candidates, MPs and political parties to raise more and more money for their campaigns. Hitherto Victoria has been fortunate to have a relatively clean record in respect of significant scandals in this space, judging from the reported ingenious, elaborate and highly suspect methods and schemes of political fundraising employed in other jurisdictions — you need only look at Canada and New South Wales and you will see some of those — in Australia and other international jurisdictions which triggered reform in those particular jurisdictions.

We have been relatively fortunate in that respect, but one suspects that it is only a matter of time until an overly zealous candidate or member of Parliament gets a little bit too enthusiastic and does the wrong thing — and that could happen to any political party. In my view the best way to mitigate against or manage the potential risk of corruption or scandal related to political campaign finance is to embrace genuine campaign finance law reform.

Through the Chair, I say to Ms Pennicuik that does not mean that just because we have been relatively clean it is not an excuse not to reform; that is not what we are saying at all, but that was the interpretation I took from what Ms Pennicuik was saying. We can talk about Victoria being relatively clean and being fortunate not to have some of the scandals associated with other jurisdictions, but that does not mean that we should not reform and lessen the risk of scandals like that happening here. I merely make the point that we have been fortunate in Victoria thus far.

The Australian Labor Party will not be lectured on campaign finance law reform when nationally, as I have just outlined, the ALP has the runs on the board in terms of regulating or attempting to regulate Australia's liberal campaign finance laws. It was the Labor governments of New South Wales and Queensland which instituted some of the most robust campaign finance laws found anywhere in the western world. Federally it was the Rudd and Gillard governments that made many attempts at passing legislation with the objective of significantly strengthening Australia's campaign finance laws, but ultimately they failed due to the lack of cooperation from other parties.

With the exception of capping donations from casino and gaming companies, Victorian campaign finance law piggybacks off the commonwealth regime. As a

consequence Victoria, along with the commonwealth, is amongst the least regulated jurisdictions in terms of campaign finance law in the western world. The question is: why do we piggyback off the commonwealth in this regard rather than going it alone, as the Greens are suggesting we should? The answer is obviously complex. Reform of campaign finance laws in Australia is problematic, primarily due to the complexities of Australia's federal governance structure, which gives the federal government and state governments the responsibility of regulating their own electoral laws. This is compounded by the existence of national parties with state-registered branches. As a result, campaign finance reform in Australia faces several constitutional and practical impediments.

One potential constitutional impediment is the inconsistency of laws. Section 109 of the commonwealth constitution states that state laws that are inconsistent with commonwealth laws may be constitutionally invalid to the extent of the inconsistency. Therefore, implementation of state law banning or capping campaign donations may be invalidated if federal laws do not especially ban or cap campaign donations and the effect of the state law is the banning or capping of federal campaign donations. Another potential constitutional impediment is the constitutional powers of the commonwealth and the states within the federal system. The implications arising from federalism and responsible government are that state laws are not able to threaten the continuing existence of the commonwealth and vice versa as separate constitutional entities with a government and parliament or elected representatives. On that basis, any state law that interferes with commonwealth elections or any commonwealth law that interferes with state elections is vulnerable to a constitutional challenge.

These jurisdictional and constitutional impediments signify that the state's campaign finance law must be restricted to state electoral campaign financing only. The threshold question is: how do you do that? In balancing the potential jurisdictional constraints it is difficult to formulate a law that is practical, effectual, free of loopholes and, equally importantly, constitutional. A big difficulty in the regulation of the campaign finance system is money seeping through the system — that is, money is expungable — and those loopholes are hard to close. Therefore campaign finance laws need to be practical, effectual and free of loopholes, and ultimately they need to be constitutional.

Yet another constitutional constraint on campaign finance law is the implied freedom of political communication in the commonwealth constitution, and that was played out in 2014 when Unions New South

Wales challenged the New South Wales government's new laws in respect of these matters. I will not go further into that, as it will add another 10 or 15 minutes to my contribution.

Ms Pennicuk interjected.

Mr SOMYUREK — Ms Pennicuk and I had a discussion about that last year, and we disagreed at that point too.

For these reasons and because of all the uncertainty that I just mentioned, the Victorian government believes that Victorian campaign finance law should continue to be in harmony with commonwealth campaign finance law to ensure that a uniform, collaborative and consistent approach is adopted. Therefore the Victorian government will work within the Council of Australian Governments to achieve national harmony of our political donations and campaign finance regulations system. We hope that Prime Minister Turnbull remains a reformer on this matter — and I think Mr Finn agrees with me — and is able to assist our quest for national reform and harmonisation of our campaign finance laws. If we are not successful in achieving reform that is in harmony with commonwealth campaign finance law, the Victorian government will revisit this issue by the end of this term to assess the options for reform.

I would therefore ask the Greens to hold their fire on this issue until we have a chance to advocate through the Council of Australian Governments and to give Prime Minister Turnbull a chance to restate his position as reformer in the campaign finance space.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to make a contribution on the motion proposed by Ms Pennicuk, being a reference to the Electoral Matters Committee to consider and report on:

- (1) whether the Electoral Act 2002 and/or the Local Government Act 1989 should be amended to create a system of political donations disclosure and/or restrictions on political donations; and
- (2) the outcomes of similar legislative reforms introduced in other relevant jurisdictions, particularly in the last six years.

It was interesting to hear Ms Pennicuk's contribution and to listen to the contribution of Mr Somyurek, who chaired a previous parliamentary inquiry into political donations and disclosure. Mr Somyurek spoke at some length about the history of the reform of political donation and disclosure in Australia over the last decade, during a period of considerable development in that area in a range of jurisdictions, including the

commonwealth and New South Wales. Ms Pennicuik spoke at some length about changes that had been introduced in New South Wales.

The crux of the matter for the Parliament this afternoon is that Ms Pennicuik's motion does not seek action on reform of political donations or the creation of a disclosure regime. It seeks a further inquiry into those matters. I have looked at the April 2009 report of the Electoral Matters Committee, which at the time was chaired by Mr Somyurek. With the exception of the time reference in the motion, the report canvasses the majority of the issues raised by Ms Pennicuik, including the issue of local government disclosure and donation. Mr Somyurek's report of April 2009 makes the point that when local government was included in the committee's consideration, at the request of Mr Barber, there was effectively no evidence provided on the issue of local government at all, with the exception of evidence provided by one witness. Notwithstanding the fact that that issue was within the scope of the inquiry in 2009, it did not generate interest in terms of the scope of donations and disclosure.

While the coalition appreciates Ms Pennicuik's sentiment in bringing forward this motion, the reality is that it does not advance the issue of the disclosure framework; it simply seeks that the Electoral Matters Committee look at these matters again. Mr Somyurek's committee made recommendations to the government as to a way forward with disclosure and donations reform. A key part of that, as Mr Somyurek said, was the harmonisation of Victorian law with that of the commonwealth. It is not clear that a lot would be achieved by undertaking another inquiry on the same matter when in reality, if this matter is advanced to a point at which the framework would change, a decision would have to be made by government. Presumably the Victorian government is looking to harmonise with the commonwealth government. It is a decision of government to seek to make the sorts of changes Ms Pennicuik has referred to.

I note that the Electoral Matters Committee is about to embark on a new reference with respect to electronic voting and opportunities for electronic voting in Victoria more widely. This is a new area of reform in electoral activity. This is a matter the coalition is quite comfortable to see the Electoral Matters Committee look at. It is something that has been undertaken in other jurisdictions. Looking at ways to improve the delivery of government services through the use of digital technology is something that should be at the forefront of government operations in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia. It is appropriate that we include the scope of electoral matters in that and seek

opportunities where the Victorian Electoral Commission's activities can be improved by the use of electronic voting or similar mechanisms, obviously where appropriate integrity frameworks are in place.

As I understand it, the Electoral Matters Committee is about to embark on that new reference, which has been given to it by the government. Our concern with Ms Pennicuik's proposal is that this motion would largely retrace ground that was covered in Mr Somyurek's inquiry in 2009 without actually advancing the issue of having a government decision looking to move forward with harmonisation across the commonwealth and state jurisdictions. It is not clear to the coalition at this point that a further inquiry into this matter would achieve any meaningful outcome in advance of the work that was done by Mr Somyurek's inquiry in 2009, as distinct from recommendations being taken up for a harmonised model between the commonwealth and the state.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to speak on the motion brought forward by Ms Pennicuik, which seeks another inquiry into political donations. We have had debates in this chamber before on similar motions from Ms Pennicuik. It seems to me that the Greens are not really interested in getting to the bottom of the real problems — all of the problems, not just the narrow set of issues that the Greens seem to be focused on. That is my problem with entertaining such a motion, because it does not really get to the bottom of understanding how influence on a political party can be increased. Making donations to political parties is not the only way of doing that.

Indeed there is currently a Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption. I have been reading some of the evidence that has been tended to that commission, some which outlines the creative ways in which the unions move money from the business sector from companies that are basically buying industrial peace from unions, and this is happening unbeknownst to union members and probably without benefiting them. I have read three examples just today. One example involved the creation of invoices for advertisements in union magazines that were never placed; another involved buying very expensive tables for union gala fundraisers; and another involved payments for non-existent training. In the latter arrangement, \$300 000 was moved, according to the evidence so far, from one company — which often benefits from government-funded projects — to the Australian Workers Union.

The poor relationship between Labor, its political arm, and the union movement, its industrial arm, is not

captured by this motion. We have what really boils down to the rorting of the business sector by the union movement for its own political benefit. Who knows how that money is used. We have read about some of it. It has been used for personal lifestyle matters and some very creative and robust recruitment. The beneficiaries may ultimately obtain a seat in Parliament.

Mr Finn — Where's Cesar?

Mrs PEULICH — I am not sure Mr Melhem is the top of the tree, the architect of the scheme. From reading the evidence I suspect there may have been a few people higher up the tree. I would not like to pre-empt the considerations of the royal commission; I am just commenting on the submission that is available on the internet.

Rorting of union funds by union organisers for the purchase of political power and influence is the other method. We have seen that and read about it and will no doubt continue to do so until there are some reforms of the governance of very large unions. We have rorting of the business sector. We have rorting of union funds. We have rorting of public funds, as is currently being investigated by the fraud squad or its equivalent in terms of the evidence and information that has come into the public domain — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — No, in passing. There is the use of casual staff for electioneering and political organisation and payments made to them from electorate office budgets. This motion looks at donations; corporate donations seem particularly to be the target of the Greens.

Ms Pennicuik interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — No. Ms Pennicuik spoke to that, and I have heard the debate before. The motion and the terms of reference could have been so much broader in terms of getting to the root of the problem, which is how political influence is currently bought through a range of financial mechanisms. These are not captured by Ms Pennicuik's motion. It is not just about corporate donations. I remember a very good contribution of Mr Dalla-Riva's talking about a significant Greens donor.

Mr Finn — Wotif.

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, Wotif. Searching on my iPhone, I have noted some very significant donations and some very wealthy individual donors. I do not know anyone in the Liberal Party — and this includes

myself — who could have access to that sort of money probably at any point in our lives, let alone make that sort of donation in a single year.

Mr Jennings — Matthew Guy as planning minister had a revolving door of property developers.

Mrs PEULICH — Let us talk about property developers. Let us talk about Progressive Business. Those opposite should not entice me to get my Excel spreadsheet out and reveal all of the donors to Progressive Business I have been compiling over the years. I would be more than happy to spend the next 2 hours going over that.

Mr Jennings — You are the puppetmaster of property developers; is that what you have just said?

Mrs PEULICH — I do know that there is certainly very ready access of government ministers to various lobbyists under this government and that there was a very different arrangement under the previous government. The biggest complaint from the business sector about the former government was that the door was not open. Such people are not whingeing now under the arrangements of those opposite. They are happy like the proverbial — —

Ms Shing interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — They are very happy they have had unprecedented access to ministers and to people of influence.

An honourable member interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I am sure those payments are not necessarily going to be declared on the Australian Electoral Commission's website.

In addition to that, there are a few gaps that needing addressing; for example, there is no requirement for Independents to make donation disclosures, or they can circumvent such requirements substantially. If Ms Pennicuik was fair dinkum and wanted to really get to the root of the problem, and if she had brought a comprehensive motion that had captured all of these issues, we might be having a very different debate. In fact I am sure that we would be.

In the meantime, we all know what we have to do: we have to make declarations. There is a register of interests; it needs to be accurate, and it needs to be regularly updated. Indeed Australian Electoral Commission returns were due, I think, by the end of September, so if — —

Mr Finn interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I am just coming to that. I do not believe it was actually in his return.

Mr Finn — He forgot about it for seven years.

Mrs PEULICH — Right. Of course we have an Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission now with powers to investigate corruption in a way that has never been able to be done before here in Victoria. This is as a result of a coalition initiative, something Labor did not support.

I agree with Mr Somyurek that financial disclosure laws should probably be nationally coordinated through the Council of Australian Governments, but that is not to say that we as members of Parliament and political parties do not have obligations. There are the fundraising codes for ministers and parliamentary secretaries. As Cabinet Secretary I was fully aware of those and meticulously made sure that they were observed. From the Somyurek inquiry's report it did not appear that those codes were widely circulated at all, let alone circulated to ministerial staffers.

I do not believe there is much to say about Ms Pennicuik's motion except that it does not capture the roting of public funds, the roting of union funds or the roting of business. It captures the Greens' narrow perspective. If Ms Pennicuik were to be fair dinkum about reforming the situation to make these arrangements more transparent, I am sure the coalition would be willing to entertain that reference. As a former member of the Electoral Matters Committee, I think it is a very good committee.

Mr Finn — It used to be a ripper.

Mrs PEULICH — It was a ripper committee, and it tabled some very good reports. We looked at electronic voting. We understand the challenges, but when we were speaking to some people in the United States no-one could believe that we still manually count votes. No doubt that will be a very important reference for the Electoral Matters Committee. When Ms Pennicuik comes back with a more comprehensive reference that is fair dinkum in terms of getting to the nub of the problem, then we will be happy to debate it in a more effusive and embracing spirit.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I will make a brief contribution to the debate today, because the substantive position of the government has been given in this debate by Mr Somyurek. Whilst Mr Somyurek indicated that it is not the government's intention —

Mr Finn — You should use him more. He is very intelligent.

Mr JENNINGS — It is our intention to do so.

Mr Somyurek appropriately and fulsomely outlined the government's position in relation to this matter today. Mr Somyurek indicated the value of further work being done, not only in this jurisdiction but across the nation in relation to disclosures about and limitations upon political donations, and the accountability framework that applies to political donations. The Labor Party accepts that. We recognise that the previous inquiry in 2009 identified a number of reforms, in a fairly benign way. The underlying thesis of those recommendations was that national harmony was the way to go. A nationally consistent approach, driven through either the federal jurisdiction or the prism of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), was the way in which these laws should be regularised across the nation.

The government today accepts the fundamental aspects of that thinking and intends to pursue through those federal mechanisms ways in which it can further these matters in the future. A wide scope of matters was considered in 2009 by the Electoral Matters Committee, as well as in the update that Ms Pennicuik has drawn attention to in her contribution today. Mr Somyurek has demonstrated a very extensive working knowledge of the reforms that have been introduced in other jurisdictions across the globe that would probably mean that on policy grounds there would be reasonable scope to pursue these matters during the course of the current Parliament.

I am confident that if we do not address these issues through national reform, then we should have the capacity within the Victorian Parliament to come back and have a look at this matter again. Certainly that has not been ruled out by the government in its opposition to the reference today. We recognise the pre-existence of the 2009 work, we recognise the need for national harmony, we recognise the need for reform and we are happy to work within the processes of COAG to achieve that. We think in some ways an additional inquiry by the Electoral Matters Committee at the moment would create an onerous work program for the committee, one that would possibly only duplicate efforts.

Over time if we as a Parliament need to come back to this matter, the government would reserve its right to consider it on the next occasion. We are happy to engage with parties in the interim to demonstrate some

degree of momentum in that regard. We are not defensive about this issue at all.

I note the variety of contributions that have come from the other side of the chamber. Hopefully we will be able to find some way forward together. Whilst we may be voting along similar lines as opposition members, our motivation seems to be slightly different. In terms of Mrs Peulich's contribution I think that motivation is quite skewed, but nonetheless we may be able to find some common ground as a Parliament to generate some traction in these matters. More importantly, and by design, I would hope we can implement change at a national level.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank Mr Somyurek, Mr Rich-Phillips, Mrs Peulich and Mr Jennings for speaking on the motion. I will make some brief responses to matters raised by the speakers.

Mr Somyurek started out by saying there is an increasing demand for wider transparency and accountability, as well as a greater media focus on the issue of campaign donations. He gave us a bit of a history lesson, going over some of the stuff that I had already spoken about in my motion, which is fine, but he reported on the genesis of the Canadian reforms that were driven by a major scandal. He also said that New Zealand and the UK followed with inquiries and changes, mainly based on the Canadian system. In terms of the capping of donations and donation disclosures, this system has been followed to some extent in jurisdictions in Australia.

Certainly, the 2009 report described the Canadian system as the gold standard. The Greens regard the Canadian system as a benchmark to be aspired to; certainly no Australian jurisdiction has got there so far. Mr Somyurek mentioned that the report recommended that Victoria wait for change at the national level, because there were changes afoot at the national level with the Joint Standing Committee On Electoral Matters inquiry, the work of the federal Special Minister of State and the legislation, which eventually did not get up. I understand all of that, but the reason I am saying we need to look at the matter again in Victoria is that in fact nothing has happened at the national level, despite attempts by the former government to effect change.

Mr Somyurek said that in 2009 other states supported harmony, and that may also be true, but in fact in the six and a half years since then other states have in fact moved because nothing has happened at the national level. Mr Somyurek went on to say that due to constitutional issues the committee decided to wait for

the federal process and that the Labor Party has moved in other states and has tried to do so at the federal level. In fact that is exactly my point: the other states have moved and have been able to move.

I think Mr Somyurek exaggerated the complex nature of the constitutional issues involved. In fact the High Court struck down part of the legislation in New South Wales and clarified some of the constitutional issues, but it left in place a disclosure regime whereby all donations above \$1000 must be disclosed and it left in place caps of \$5000 for parties and \$2000 for individual candidates and the ability for New South Wales to ban donations from property developers, from tobacco, gambling, gaming and the liquor industries, and to ban donations from unenrolled individuals and any entity without an Australian business number. In other words, the High Court struck down part of the legislation but left in place many other parts, so the High Court decision has not meant that states cannot move on their own, and in fact, as I outlined, they have.

In response to the issues I raised arising from the 2009 report Mr Somyurek said that Victoria has not had a major scandal as has occurred in other jurisdictions, that it is probably only a matter of time before there is a scandal in Victoria and that we have been lucky. I would not want us to wait until there is a scandal. We should be moving on this issue because other states have, and in terms of harmonisation, we need to be harmonising with the other states which have moved, particularly with respect to disclosure. Victoria is way behind in this area and is now the only state that defaults entirely to the commonwealth system, which is completely unacceptable and inappropriate and needs to be amended. Whether that will happen through a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process I am not sure, but the opportunity exists for us to be in harmony with the rest of the states, and that is what we should be doing.

Mr Somyurek suggested that I should hold fire and that the government will do something at the end of its term, but the end of the term will be an election year, which I would suggest is probably not the best time for the Electoral Matters Committee to be wrapped up in this inquiry, which is why I am moving the motion now, for the inquiry to be completed midway through next year. Mr Rich-Phillips gave a modest response in opposing the motion. For example, he said that I am not seeking action but a further inquiry. Of course Mr Rich-Phillips would be aware that I did seek action with regard to not taking donations from property developers, caps on donations, increased disclosure and so on in 2009, 2010 and 2014. In this particular motion I would like the committee to examine what has happened in the six and

a half years since it tabled the report of its previous inquiry in April 2009. A lot has happened since then.

He also mentioned that the 2009 inquiry received little evidence with regard to the need for change at the local government level and that local government did not generate any interest. I would suggest that that is probably because local government was not included in the 2008 terms of reference, and that is why I have included it in this reference. He went on to say that my reference would not advance the issue, and he implied that we have all we need to know from the 2009 report and that a new inquiry would not advance this issue, but so much has happened in the intervening six and a half years that much could be achieved by a re-examination by the committee.

Mr Rich-Phillips also mentioned a new reference on electronic voting. As I said, that may be worthwhile. In fact there is no reason the committee could not be doing both inquiries. Many of the standing committees in this house are working on more than one inquiry at a time, and there is no reason the Electoral Matters Committee could not also be doing that. If that is the reason, it is not much of a reason. Overall I am very disappointed with the reasons Mr Rich-Phillips scratched up for not supporting the motion. I think Victoria does need to pull its socks up with regard to this issue.

Mrs Peulich spent most of her time not talking about the motion except to say that it is not broad enough when in fact it is a very broad motion that allows the committee to look into any type of reform that may be required under either the Electoral Act 2002 or the Local Government Act 1989. She then spent most of her time talking about the royal commission into unions.

Mr Jennings finished up by praising Mr Somyurek for his fulsome outlining of the government's position, which is basically that the government will do something if nothing is done at the federal level. Mr Jennings said that the ALP recognises that the 2009 report identifies some reforms that are needed, but six and a half years down the track those reforms have not been implemented, not even the reforms that were recommended in the report.

Mr Jennings said that the government intends to pursue the matters through COAG. I do not have any opposition to pursuing the matters through COAG, but I would also say that COAG could be informed by Victoria moving on this issue as the other states have done, and that might be an impetus for further reform at the national level. He finished by saying that if the issue

is not addressed at the national level, the ALP will have a look at it again.

My concern with the ALP and the Liberal Party not supporting this motion is that it leaves Victoria in the situation of having less-than-satisfactory legislation with regard to campaign donations, and that is widely understood. One of the opening sentences of the 2009 report was that Victoria and the commonwealth are the least regulated jurisdictions in the Western world, and that situation remains.

I was interested to read an article by Marian Sawer, emeritus professor at the school of politics and international relations, Australian National University. It relates to the allegations of mafia involvement in political donations. Amongst the matters raised in the article she says:

Despite some toing and froing as governments have changed or High Court challenges have been mounted, it is at the state and territory level that most progress has been made in the past five years.

She talks about the South Australian cross-party agreement and other changes and then goes on to say:

It is unfortunate that it is only scandals and the perception of corruption or criminal involvement that prompt moves to reform Australia's political finance regime. While it is important to remove perceptions of undue influence, it is equally important to uphold democratic principles such as that of political equality and a level playing field for electoral competition.

Those whose supporters have deep pockets should not be given an unfair advantage in electoral competition. Nor should cashed-up voices be able to drown out others in the electronic media.

Political equality does not exist when some are able to purchase access to ministers or senior political figures through large political donations or paying inflated prices for seats at a dinner.

...

In a context where the unrestricted role of private money and the abuse of public resources has become normalised in Australian elections, the shock of discovering mafia involvement in political donations may be a positive one. Hopefully, there will be renewed momentum for electoral reform — concerned with first principles, not just with integrity issues.

I am disappointed that the major parties are again shying away from legislative reform with regard to electoral campaign donations. This would have been an opportunity for the Electoral Matters Committee to look again at this issue, given what has happened in the intervening years. I do not have any faith that we are going to move any faster on this issue than we have in the past six years.

House divided on motion:*Ayes, 7*

Barber, Mr	Pennicuik, Ms
Dunn, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Purcell, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Hartland, Ms	Springle, Ms
Patten, Ms	

Noes, 31

Atkinson, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Bath, Ms	Morris, Mr
Bourman, Mr	Mulino, Mr
Carling-Jenkins, Dr	O'Donohue, Mr
Crozier, Ms	Ondarchie, Mr
Dalidakis, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Dalla-Riva, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Pulford, Ms
Davis, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Drum, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Eideh, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Shing, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Finn, Mr	Symes, Ms
Fitzherbert, Ms	Tierney, Ms
Herbert, Mr	Wooldridge, Ms
Jennings, Mr	Young, Mr
Leane, Mr	

Motion negatived.**ELECTORATE OFFICE STAFF**

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) notes Labor members' alleged misuse of casual electorate officers as field organisers for the Labor Party's Community Action Network; and
- (2) calls on ministers in the Legislative Council to release casual staff time sheets for the 2014–15 financial year.

I have not always seen eye to eye with James Campbell, the *Herald Sun* reporter, but I will just take a moment to commend him on his outstanding investigative work, which will probably be worthy of another award further down the track.

An honourable member interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I think he is doing a commendable job in exposing what has clearly been an election stolen through a very clever plan of political corruption and the siphoning of public funds in order to pay political organisers working as field officers on behalf of the Labor Party in organising and building the Labor Party's Community Action Network, which is comprised of, ultimately, volunteers mobilised in key seats in order to win, as I said, the last state election. When we look at the slender margins by which many of those seats were won, many of them in my region, no-one could dispute the significance of this particular

scheme, and it is beholden on this house, it is beholden on our media and it is beholden on those members of Parliament who may have been a party to it unwittingly to come clean and fess up, given in particular the commitment of the Special Minister of State that he would fully cooperate with any processes and inquiries and, although it came a little belatedly, the Premier's commitment to do likewise.

This is an opportunity for those ministers to come clean and not to throw under the political truck the lives and careers of young Labor Party activists who perhaps unwittingly have been involved in a scam of major proportions, which make previous casualties of what is loosely seen as rotting of the system pale into insignificance.

I am referring to the front page article of the *Herald Sun* of Friday, 18 September, headed 'Rorts and consequences', which compares and looks at the three most prominent casualties of controversy, including former federal Speaker Bronwyn Bishop, who lost her job as Speaker as a result of a \$5227 helicopter ride. I am not defending the helicopter ride; all I want to do is place into context the amount of money that we are talking about. We are also talking about former federal Speaker Peter Slipper, who lost his job — and I am not defending his actions — for misuse of his Cabcharge allowance to the tune of about \$954. Former member for Frankston Geoff Shaw, who was defeated at the last state election, was harangued repeatedly — and I am not defending at all what he had done — by the then Leader of the Opposition, now Premier, Daniel Andrews, for an amount of \$6838.

It is really important to understand who are the architects of this Labor scam — who issued the directives for members of Parliament to breach the rules under which we all operate in order to put in place a method by which obviously the last state election was stolen through the misuse of public funds. That is what I am interested in.

I would like to commend the *Herald Sun* for the role it played in exposing a sequence or a list of information that emerged, probably as a result of initially the manner in which the investigations of Adem Somyurek, the former Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, occurred and some of the information that emerged as a result of some of the witness statements that were not directly within the parameters of the terms of reference given by the Premier for the inquiry. Those terms of reference were very narrow post the election, but in my view there was certainly some evidence that should have been pursued that refers to other duties being performed before the state election by some of

these personnel. In particular I am referring to young Mr Xavier Smith, who I understand, like many others, had been employed as additional casual staff for the purpose of being a field organiser. I would be very interested to know what those other duties were. It is regrettable that the terms of reference did not enable that to be fleshed out so that appropriate referrals could be made to other authorities.

The rules are quite clear in terms of how our staff and our public funds are to be used. I start off by making reference to the Parliamentary Administration Act 2005, section 30(1), where it says quite clearly:

The presiding officers, acting jointly, may, on behalf of the Crown, employ as an electorate officer to assist a member of Parliament, a person nominated by that member.

According to some of the information that has emerged, some of the people who were employed as casual officers from early 2014 were not actually working for the member who had filled out the forms, nor necessarily in that member's electorate, which is a clear abuse of the rules. In addition to that there are clear job descriptions for electorate officers. There is a code of conduct that applies to electorate officers, and the analysis of those 'other duties' should be done by considering what those other duties were and how they measure up to the electorate officer roles and the key performance indicators that are used by each of us in order to review electorate officer performance.

Also, there are other relevant provisions within the same act. Section 30(2) states:

The employment of a person under subsection (1) must be under an agreement in writing and is subject to any terms and conditions that are determined for the time being by the presiding officers, acting jointly.

That does not seem to have been the case. I do not believe that the President of the upper house would have agreed to such a misuse of public funds, and nor do I believe that section 30(4), which reads:

Despite subsection (2), the duties and responsibilities of a person employed as an electorate officer are to be determined by the member who nominated that person —

would actually mean that a member could allow or authorise a publicly funded officer to perform any duties that they like. For example, I could not hire someone and get them to work in my husband's private business to make calls or to undertake activities that are not prescribed in the role of an electorate officer.

Typically in an offer of employment we as members of Parliament are required to generate documentation, and I have just pulled out one of my most recent documents.

It says to the person I was offering employment to, at paragraph 3:

Your manager will be —

and it is my name, Inga Peulich, MLC for South Eastern Metropolitan —

and your work location will be —

and in this instance it says the Chelsea electorate office. That does not mean that a person necessarily needs to be in the electorate office 100 per cent of the time. There may be duties that as a member I require an electorate officer to undertake; for example, to go to the local RSL and place a wreath on Remembrance Day, which they will be doing because we will be sitting in Parliament when we should be fulfilling these broader duties.

In all of the material and all of the policies there is an obligation for there to be transparency and accountability, but ultimately the member has to either supervise directly or approve the work that is undertaken by their electorate officers — by the people they employ. It is not just signing casual employment forms and allowing someone else to generate the work and supervise their work, or perhaps generating forms for employment and payment for someone they may not have ever met.

I believe this is serious rotting of the system of incredible proportions. I believe the figure that is currently being looked at is about \$1.5 million, which, as I said, makes those other examples where people lost significant positions pale into insignificance when we consider the level of rotting that appears to have been unearthed, and at the end of the day it will be unearthed. The question is whether it will be unearthed by people who are the architects of the scheme or the person at the top who authorised the scheme. There can be no other such person except the leader of the Labor Party, and he has stated that he takes responsibility.

This is an opportunity for him to come clean, to take responsibility and to save the reputations of a whole generation of young Labor Party activists who perhaps may not have been aware that what they were doing was against the rules, because I am not convinced that many of them were aware. I have met some of them. I did not realise what the arrangements were, but with hindsight I am able to piece together the jigsaw puzzle of information and the visuals of who we saw working where to understand precisely what happened.

The *Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Electorate Officers* is quite clear. At part 3.6, headed 'Other employment', it says:

Parliamentary electorate officers only engage in other employment where the activity does not conflict with their role as a parliamentary electorate officer. Employment includes a second job, conducting a business, trade or profession, or active involvement with other organisations (paid employment or voluntary work). The member of Parliament and/or the Presiding Officers can assist to determine if such activities will cause an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

I hope that neither of the current Presiding Officers tacitly approved of such a scheme. I believe they are both honourable men. I would be very disappointed to learn that some of our ministers in the upper house gave tacit approval by participating in this scheme either by coercion or willingness in what I think is the biggest scandal facing this Parliament.

Further, the code of conduct states:

Parliamentary electorate officers are required to seek approval to engage in any other paid employment from the member of Parliament whom they serve.

Therefore an implicit responsibility falls on the shoulders of those members of Parliament who signed those casual forms. The code continues:

Parliamentary electorate officers must comply with any policies issued by the Presiding Officers in relation to engaging in other employment.

I am not sure that many of those young Labor Party activists — some of them, not all of them, are fine young men and women — would have ever seen this code of conduct, but it is the obligation of the employers, the members of Parliament, to draw it to their attention and ensure they understand its contents. Some of them are very concerned about what impact this will have on their futures and the trashing their reputations have received in the process. They do not want to be a part of the lie, the scam, as this clearly has been.

Regrettably I note also today — and I am glad we have not gone down the same track — that the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly has deemed the word 'rotting' to be unparliamentary, and it will not be allowed to be used. That will certainly put all of our media outlets — —

Mr Barber — Apparently it is the word that is offensive, not the action.

Mrs PEULICH — A very good interjection from Mr Barber, being that the word is offensive, but the

action is clearly embedded in the DNA of those who conceived this scam. The architects of this can be no other than the then leaders of the Labor Party I would assume, including the leader in this chamber, and there are questions for each and every one of them to answer. There are questions for Mr Jennings to answer. There are questions for Mr Lenders, who is no longer here, to answer. There are questions, obviously, for Daniel Andrews as the leader of the Labor Party to answer. He has been stonewalling and deliberately confounding and confusing the notion of pooled staff, which may have occurred in the past but it does not mean that even pooled staff can be used in the manner that the Labor Party was using the casual staff — that is, as field organisers and regional organisers; I believe there were regional organisers — in order to build up and identify the issues, identify the voters and build a red army in order to swindle a very closely contested state election.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I am not suggesting that everyone who wore a red shirt was a rorter. I am talking about the casually employed field officers, partly paid by ALP headquarters and partly paid through deception and fraud from the public funds of our electorate office budgets. The others may have been genuine volunteers, as there will be, and when we have our by-elections in the Assembly seats of Polwarth and South-West Coast we will see an army of people wearing blue shirts. I am not — —

Mr Leane interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — You are just attempting to distract and to detract. There is absolutely no excuse for this not to be fully investigated by the police. I am delighted to hear that they are progressively working through the list of field organisers, who were self-identifying on LinkedIn until the matter was drawn to the attention of the Labor Party. Overnight they were asked to remove that information from LinkedIn, but a full list of those people had been assembled. Everyone knows who they are. There are the whistleblowers and there is evidence, and it will be followed through. These breaches are very serious.

I am just having a cursory look at the Crimes Act 1958. One assumes, and there are a number of assumptions that obviously need to be looked at, that the forms were prepared for MPs to sign, that MPs signed those forms, that those preparing the forms sought to gain a benefit — namely, the receipt of labour for campaign purposes — that the organisers knew or should have known that they were not entitled to the benefit paid by

the state, and that the performance of campaign tasks was not authorised by the state.

There is no doubt — all of the documentation is there — that this was use of public resources in an unauthorised way. On that basis the preparation and submission of documents to payroll to pay staff may have involved the commission of a number of offences under the Crimes Act. One of those is in section 82, 'Obtaining financial advantage by deception'. To commit this offence there must have been an act of dishonesty involved in the deception. This may have occurred either at the hiring point as to the duties, supervision et cetera of the employees, or at the stage of payment when hours worked details would be submitted.

The same rules apply in either case even if the pay sheets were lodged electronically if the acceptance was on the basis of information provided. It is absolutely imperative that the time sheets from February 2014 to the state election of casually employed staff of those Labor MPs who reportedly, whether through coercion or willingly, participated in the biggest scam in the history of this Parliament be released.

Through my many sources I am advised that the scam involved upper house MPs contributing one staff member. I do not know how that could be possible. I have two staff members. I spend a lot of my budget each year, every year, on additional administrative support in my office in order to be able to manage the workload, which is huge. If somebody asked me to give over a staff member, I could not do it — and I would not do it. It is clearly in breach of the rules and I believe potentially in breach of section 82 of the Crimes Act.

Section 83 could also support an accusation of false accounting. If an MP submitted line items in their budget for expenses incurred in electorate office work but those funds were not actually used for that purpose, they may have committed this offence. There are a number of offences to which I think people are very vulnerable. Section 178 says that 'giving or receiving false or misleading receipt or account' is an indictable offence. It may well be that the people who were the architects of this scam or who knowingly participated in something that was illegal are guilty of an indictable offence and therefore have no right to continue sitting in this place. That is a very serious offence. If MPs submitted false and misleading receipts, accounts or documents such as false —

An honourable member — Time sheets.

Mrs PEULICH — Absolutely, if they submitted false time sheets to the state in order to receive a return, which was obviously the employment of people for a political benefit, they have committed this offence, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment. This is a serious business. In addition to that there is the offence of perjury and, more seriously, the offence of conspiracy under section 321. This is indeed a very serious matter. It is noteworthy that knowledge of the offence is unnecessary; only knowledge of the facts and outcome is required. It is not necessary to know that it was a crime, only to know of and conspire in the acts themselves. In other words, keeping things covered up makes even those who may have been unwitting conscripts to this scam vulnerable. This is an opportunity for all of those who participated unwittingly or through coercion to come clean and produce these time sheets.

The *Herald Sun* produced an outstanding editorial today. I would like to quote bits of it, because I think it is an excellent summary of the facts as they stand to date. It states that there is:

... mounting evidence about the party's misuse of hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxpayers money.

The audit of the use of electorate budgets authorised by the Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services indicates that. The *Herald Sun* article states there is evidence that:

More than 20 Labor MPs may have participated in the rort.

Apart from upper house MPs being forced to hire casual staff to act as field organisers, I understand lower house MPs in safe seats also participated in the scheme.

Mr Leane — You seem to understand a lot.

Mrs PEULICH — I understand that, and let me tell Mr Leane that this view is shared by a lot of young committed Labor activists who are personally wounded, aggrieved and concerned about their futures because they were not aware that this was not legal. We know what the rules are. It is up to the Premier now to take full responsibility. He has said:

... everything that occurs under my leadership of the Labor Party and my leadership of the government —

is his responsibility. He has failed the test of leadership. The Premier should not only admit responsibility; he should stand down. Clearly he is ultimately responsible for the architecture of this scam.

I understand the Labor Party Community Action Network operated on a system of three or four phases

of activity. I have some detailed notes about what those may have been, but unfortunately I did not bring them along. That activity involved organisational activity, recruitment, identification of issues and organisation of political activity for candidates. The rules are there, and the rules apply in particular to casual staff. That is why we are calling for this release now. The rules apply to using pool staff for the purposes of electioneering.

This is a very different ball game to, for example, if there is a research project being worked on by a group and a member of Parliament is asked to support its completion with three days of work. In that case the workers remain under the direct supervision of the member of Parliament. If casual forms are being prepared for MPs to sign when they may not have even sighted the casual employee, it is a clear breach of the rules. That employee is not under the MP's direct supervision. I would hope MPs have not authorised the deliberate rorting of electorate office budgets. MPs must supervise and approve the work which is undertaken by a casual employee. There is no shortcut on this.

I was particularly perturbed to learn that MPs were asked to sign forms in advance. That is a clear breach. That is why the forms need to be released. These breaches have been referred to the police for investigation. The Premier himself and the party itself should have bitten the bullet and made a referral. The Premier was invited to by the —

Mr Leane — That's rubbish.

Mrs PEULICH — Mr Leane says it is rubbish. When there were allegations made against former Premier Ted Baillieu, he instigated a referral to IBAC. Ultimately those allegations were dismissed because there was no substance to them, but he wanted to be open, transparent, accountable and indeed honourable. Ultimately he paid a price. Daniel Andrews wants everyone but himself to pay a price. The only job that he is interested in protecting is his own. The people who are the most answerable here need to fess up. Some MPs may no longer be here, so I am not sure how the police intend to deal with them; some of them have either been defeated or have retired.

The starting point is here today, with this call on ministers in the Legislative Council to release casual staff timesheets for the 2014–15 financial year. This is a very bad look for Labor, especially for its elder statesmen and leaders. They are supposed to be the role models of the labour movement. I do not believe that these young staffers should be thrown under the proverbial political truck to protect those who have

been rewarded with ministries or the premiership. Those young staffers and MPs who may have been compelled, ordered or wrongly advised that this fraudulent activity was okay are the casualties of this scam.

Those involved should do the honourable thing — release the documents and out themselves — and they should do so today. The reality is that some of these MPs, if found to have committed fraud, may no longer have the right to continue to serve in this Parliament. The real culprits are the senior architects of this scheme to defraud the state of Victoria. If it is the Premier, he should exit with honour, take responsibility and resign to save his team and those young Labor activists who believe in his party. He should not throw them to the wolves just to save his own skin.

We all know that Labor receives union largesse in return for generous enterprise bargaining agreement deals. We have Labor MPs rorting public purses to pay for political organisers. We have unions rorting businesses, which have to buy industrial peace or risk time and cost blowouts on projects, many of which have been publicly funded. This has been evidenced in the testimony of the federal Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, to the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption. Union funds are being misused for narrow private political agendas or internal and external political advancement. Labor is on a merry-go-round of rorts.

This marks a change in Labor history. In the modern Labor Party, rorting seems to be in Labor's DNA. The true believers of the labour movement would shiver and turn in their graves at what is happening today. Where is the honour in Labor? There is none. My father, who was a very simple man — yes, he was a double degree graduate, but he tended to boil things down to very simple principles — always said, 'The fish always smells from the head down'. We certainly know that there is one barracuda in the Assembly who needs to take responsibility and resign — step down — because ultimately he must take responsibility for the architecture of this scam and rort on the public purse. With those few words, I commend the motion to the house.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am not too sure what response I wish to give to Mrs Peulich, but for her to say that this is the biggest scandal this Parliament has ever faced is amazing. If you boil it down to the accusations that have been made by the media and the opposition, you find that the crux of the issue is that people who work in the offices of politicians sometimes act politically. It amazes me that

in the two-party adversarial system we are under — with due respect to the third party and the minor parties, there is no better way to explain the system we are under — for an opposition to push a position that people who work in politicians' offices never act politically and never should act politically is amazing.

I put it to the opposition and the non-government parties that all activities that politicians and their staff do outside of government are political. That is the system we are under. Politicians and their officers — the people who work for them — strive in a two-party system to go from that side of this chamber to this side of the chamber. Those opposite seem to believe that under this system they would be better in government than the current government. That is why those opposite strive in everything they do. Everything done by people who work in the offices of politicians has to be political. We are politicians, and politics is the crux of the system under which we work. I say to Mrs Peulich: this is the big scandal — that sometimes people who work in politicians' offices act politically. I have to say in response to Mrs Peulich — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Leane is deliberately misconstruing my comments. At no time did I say that those field officers worked within offices. What I was criticising and attempting to get to the bottom of was that the fieldwork they did as political campaigners was often in abutting seats or perhaps even on the other side of Melbourne — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! I have heard enough of Mrs Peulich's point of order. Mr Leane has just started his contribution to the debate. He has a point. He is talking about the motion Mrs Peulich raised in Parliament, so I ask Mr Leane to continue.

Mr LEANE — As I was going to say in response — and I think Mrs Peulich might take this as a compliment — her office is legendary in the south-east for political activity not only during state elections but also in federal and council elections. I am saying it is a legend; it might not be true. But the legend that is out there is that the energy generated from the political activity inside Mrs Peulich's office during those election periods could probably power a small town.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, that is a reflection on me. This is well outside the motion, but could I just say the energy that is generated in relation to political activity surrounding council elections in particular comes from my home.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! I ask Mr Leane to get back to the motion.

Mr LEANE — I am happy to get back to the motion. The crux of this big scandal is that people who work in politicians' offices sometimes act politically. If this is the big smoking gun that could result in people going to jail, then I say to Mrs Peulich that I would not be surprised if one day when I am sitting next to a hardened criminal in jail and they ask me what I am in for and I respond, 'Actually, I'm a politician, and from time to time people in my office acted politically', I reckon I would end up running the place. I would be getting responses like, 'There's one hard dude. You'd better hand over all your contraband to that guy!'. This big conspiracy is a joke.

Mrs Peulich talks about an election being stolen. I put it to Mrs Peulich that her government stole the election from themselves when they did not deliver the election commitments they made.

Mr Barber — The Doncaster rail link.

Mr LEANE — I will get to that one. When in government Mrs Peulich's government had a couple of years of inertia when it cut funding to health and TAFEs. Then there was David Davis. I do not think I will expand on him, but he was probably high up on our best and fairest when we counted the votes at the end of the previous government's term. Mrs Peulich's party stole the election from themselves. As far as it being stolen, Mrs Peulich's party contributed to that completely.

Here we are talking about this conspiracy and about electorate officers being political. It is all about what colour shirt you wore. I say to the other side of the chamber: there were heaps of blue shirts out there.

Mr Finn — They weren't being paid though.

Mr LEANE — That is a very good question, Mr Finn. Were they getting paid? Because I know that in Eastern Metropolitan Region — —

Mr Finn — On a point of order, President, I do not wish to unduly upset the flow of Mr Leane's eloquent waxing, but he is attempting to put words in my mouth that have not come from it, and I think that is something that he should perhaps if not withdraw at least cease and desist from doing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! I believe Mr Leane was referring to Mr Finn's interjection. I understand that is how he understood the interjection.

Mr LEANE — I remind the house that interjections are unruly, but I apologise to Mr Finn if I misheard what he said and I withdraw if I misconstrued his statement.

There were lots of blue shirts at pre-poll booths, and people were saying to me, ‘That person actually works for that MP’ and ‘That person over there is actually so-and-so’s electorate officer’. When they said that to me I thought they might have been on the books at the time and they may have been on holiday. That might have been the case. I am prepared to give people the benefit of the doubt, because despite whatever flavour an electorate officer is, they have a hard job.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr LEANE — If Mrs Peulich thinks this is the biggest smoking gun that the Parliament has ever seen, she is in some sort of la-la land. If this is what Mrs Peulich thinks will bring about a change of government, she has not learnt anything from the time she spent in government, because what people care about is health, education, roads and public transport — all the areas that the former government failed to deliver on, despite the big fanfare and the number of commitments that it took to the election around building the Doncaster rail line. There were multiple promises which the government failed to deliver.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr LEANE — I remember the huge fanfare around the Doncaster rail line.

We have people saying this is the biggest conspiracy they have seen. Members of the opposition are saying —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! It distresses me enormously to inform the house and Mr Leane that we must leave it there to move on to statements on reports and papers.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: *Regional Growth Fund — Outcomes and Learnings*

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General’s report entitled *Regional Growth Fund — Outcomes and Learnings*.

By way of background, the Regional Growth Fund was introduced by the Liberal-Nationals coalition with eight

years of funding: \$500 million for the first four years and another \$500 million for the following four years. However, an extra \$70 million was added to the fund in the first four years, so the Regional Growth Fund provided over \$570 million in grants to local councils, businesses, departments and agencies over the four-year period through a number of funding streams, including the Latrobe Valley Industry and Infrastructure Fund, the Putting Locals First program, the Energy to the Regions program and the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. Overall the Regional Growth Fund was very beneficial to many of the towns in my electorate, so it was disappointing to read the way the Auditor-General identified the value of some of the projects that were delivered through this program.

As the audit summary pointed out, approximately a quarter of Victorians live in regional areas and the regional economy provides for 21 per cent of the state’s employment. Regional and rural towns such as those in my electorate face a range of different challenges compared to metropolitan areas. There are fewer economic opportunities, and there are issues with developing and maintaining local infrastructure such as our country roads. We also face adverse environmental issues, such as fire and flood, which we have seen recently. The Regional Growth Fund was developed to help regional Victorians deal with these challenges and assist our regional and rural towns to grow, drive employment, provide more opportunities and improve resilience as well as the livability of the area.

Many people in the Latrobe Valley and the wider Gippsland area would agree that this is what the Regional Growth Fund did. It helped create jobs and improve our local communities. It was a fantastic success for our communities, with the fund supporting almost 1800 projects and leveraging more than \$2 billion worth of investment. It created 23 000 jobs, including direct full-time jobs, indirect jobs and employment in the construction sector. It is a shame that this report has put a slightly negative slant on what was a positive program for so many Gippslanders. I understand it can be hard to put a monetary value on the flow-on effects of such investment in regional communities, but this fund was important because it helped to fund local projects and provided flexible funding to help communities fill those gaps in services and infrastructure. In doing so it created many job opportunities.

As I have previously said in this chamber, sometimes it is the little projects that can make the big difference. In our communities we had funding for hall upgrades, street beautification, community hubs, sporting clubs, bridges and footpaths. Only last week I was in the great

town of Yinnar in the Latrobe Valley to attend the opening of an art resource collective centre, affectionately called the Arc building, which was funded through approximately \$80 000 from the coalition government's Regional Growth Fund and \$40 000 from the Latrobe City Council. It was a great blend.

Arc Yinnar is a not-for-profit organisation that houses artists in residence. Its building accommodates offices, a gallery and studio spaces for ceramics, metalwork, photography and painting. It has a retail outlet and a theatre. The restoration of this historic building was very important to the community, as the building was in dire need of an upgrade to allow better access for people with a disability. The building provides an important outlet for art classes and a venue for community groups. It is now a wonderful space, and I can see it will be used for all sorts of functions.

It is projects like this, which are driven by the community with the support of local council and government, that the Regional Growth Fund helped to deliver. The fund helped realise big and small community-driven projects, with the assistance of local councils in many cases, as we have seen.

Although the report by the Auditor-General questions Regional Development Victoria's application and performance evaluation processes in regard to the fund, I do not believe it can say the fund was ineffective. There are many Gippslanders in my electorate who would sing the praises of this fund and have benefited from its investment. I can only hope that the Andrews Labor government does not use this report as an excuse to try to take away funding from this region.

Auditor-General: *Follow Up of Managing Major Projects*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak about the Auditor-General's report *Follow Up of Managing Major Projects*. The report focuses on the implementation of recommendations or improvements by Major Projects Victoria (MPV), if any, following the first report. While the report identifies ongoing problems with consultants and certain processes, there appears to have been a concerted effort made by Major Projects Victoria to improve its administrative practices and associated governance.

Major Projects Victoria has given the state many wonderful landmarks. Beginning in the 1980s with the Cain Labor government, and in the last few decades following that, Melbourne has been characterised by the presence of large numbers of hydraulic cranes on

the skyline. Melbourne did not become the most livable city in the world overnight. Major Projects Victoria has much to be proud of. However, I suspect it is not taking seriously the Auditor-General's criticism of its methods of operation.

Stating the obvious, professionally rigorous project management is the key to the success of any construction project. However, it would appear that during the initial audit several weaknesses were identified and several recommendations were put in place to remedy those shortfalls. According to the Auditor-General, Major Projects Victoria needs to lift its game. It has not applied any mechanism or strategy in the long term to address these recommendations or their underlying issues.

The public sector must be not only transparent in its operation and all its dealings, it must also be seen to be transparent. Once the ugly face of corruption raises its head all stated principles and good intentions mean nothing. It is not true to say that MPV has totally ignored the recommendations set out in the initial audit; rather it has made reporting on its performance a priority. MPV has introduced an electronic system and associated processes to monitor and report on projects.

It would be true to say that without an effective monitoring mechanism in any organisation, changes to modes of operation rarely, if ever, occur. Specially constituted committees of oversight can meet regularly, have agendas prepared and have discussions taking place, but if changes are not implemented, then it really does not matter who chairs the meetings, because nothing will happen to alter the status quo.

I know the state minister responsible will focus on the methods of operation of Major Projects Victoria with a view to impressing upon its management the importance of transparency and accountability to ensure long-term benefits for the organisation and for the people of Victoria. For three years running Melbourne has been voted the world's most livable city, and this is no mean feat.

Victorian small business commissioner: report 2014–15

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to make a statement on the annual report of the Victorian small business commissioner. The challenges facing small business were to be addressed by the creation of the role of the Victorian small business commissioner. The commissioner has a number of roles, including providing information to Victorian businesses, helping them with dispute resolution,

particularly surrounding the Retail Leases Act 2003, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005, the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983, national issues and so on.

Unfortunately the number of disputes has grown, and I would imagine that that number will continue to grow as a result of the most recent grand final eve public holiday. I have recently sent out 5000 communications to small businesses across the south-east, and I received a deluge of responses from small business owners who were very angry about the additional public holiday on the eve of the AFL Grand Final. In particular they were concerned about the implications for the bottom line of their businesses. The new public holiday particularly affected the hospitality industry, which would well be expected to operate on public holidays.

Small business owners in this industry were unlikely to hire casual staff, because in many cases they would have to pay double time and a half. As a result, they themselves or their family members had to work, so there was certainly no family time for them. According to the Premier, that was the reason for this additional public holiday, but there was no family time for those hundreds of thousands of small businesses run by families. A number of businesses could not afford to close but made a substantial loss on the day. Hairdressers are one example. Friday is a huge trading day for them. The implications of the penalty rates for them was substantial. They could not close because they would have lost their clients; they had no choice. They were held hostage to a very bad government policy.

Some of the real victims of this policy are the small businesses that are located in shopping complexes, which are subject to retail leases. That includes businesses at places like DFO. Irrespective of whether or not they were interested in opening, they had to open or risk being fined, and many of them have made substantial losses as a result of that.

I heard about mothers who had paid for a week's worth of child care, and just because it was a public holiday they were not reimbursed for the Friday. So that was money they lost from their family pockets.

The casual employees themselves lost money, and a number of these, of course, are young people. We know many of them are on the borderline of poverty. They often have to rely on their parents in order to pay their basic bills.

Small businesses are doing it tough under this government, and we will need a miracle worker in the Office of the Victorian Small Business Commissioner to deal with many of the problems that emerge as a result of the financial hardship they have had to endure and will endure every year as a result of this additional public holiday. I note in particular the businesses I doorknocked in the electorate of Polwarth, in Bannockburn. Many of them were compelled to open, but they were strongly against the public holiday on the eve of the grand final. There may have been some exceptions, but in the wash, I imagine that the Victorian small business commissioner is going to have a very big job over the next 12 months.

One of the big problems was that many businesses did not know about the public holiday or what their obligations were, so clearly the provision of information, which is one of the roles of the small business commissioner, will have to be beefed up, given that this government has failed to do its own job.

Lastly, the contempt in which small business is held by this government is exemplified by the fact that the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Mr Dalidakis, has still not appointed members to the multicultural small business advisory committee nor the Victorian small business council. These are both crucial bodies that would advise him of concerns faced by small businesses.

Auditor-General: Occupational Violence Against Healthcare Workers

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's report on *Occupational Violence Against Healthcare Workers* of May 2015. This is a report which I will say at the outset I found very disconcerting, one which deals with a matter I feel should be taken very seriously by the organisations that are expected to lead Victoria's healthcare workers.

I doubt that I would find a person who would disagree with me when I say that healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses and paramedics, perform a critically important role in caring for our community. We are privileged in the sense that when an emergency situation arises and a Victorian requires urgent medical treatment we know that help will not be far away from the scene in the form of our dedicated ambulance officers. Once the situation has been stabilised, and the patient arrives at hospital, they are in the best possible care in our hospitals with dedicated nurses and doctors.

We assume this, and yet healthcare workers assume that occupational violence is just part of the job. Healthcare workers face particular risks of violence, because they are at the front line, where people are faced with highly stressful issues. They work in unpredictable and potentially volatile situations. Such situations may involve, for example, dealing with a patient whose condition may lead them to exhibit unintentionally violent behaviour or with concerned family members who, when confronted with a stressful situation involving their loved ones and healthcare workers, may become agitated. Another situation where healthcare workers find themselves at risk of violence is when an individual requiring care is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. With the increasing prevalence of dangerous drugs such as ice severely impacting upon the mental state of users, I believe this risk will keep on increasing.

This is inexcusable. It is inexcusable that we as a community have an expectation that the Auditor-General's report describes as follows:

... there seems to be a misplaced community expectation that healthcare workers — as members of caring professions — should continue to provide care regardless of the risks they may face.

I was shocked to read in the report that:

... incidents least likely to be reported are those not requiring medical attention — near misses, verbal abuse, and incidents causing mental or psychological distress. Our examination of the audited health services incident reporting data found that incidents routinely categorised as 'mild', 'near miss' or 'no harm' included attempted strangulation, kicking a pregnant woman in the stomach, sexually inappropriate conduct, and being kicked and punched.

How on earth are these categorised as 'mild', 'near miss' or 'no harm'? What is most frightening is that the true extent of the occupational violence against healthcare workers in Victoria is not known. Such categorising of inexcusable acts committed against our healthcare workers downplays the severity of these incidents and does not foster an environment in which future occurrences and risks will be prevented and managed.

The Auditor-General has made 10 recommendations and called on the Department of Health and Human Services and WorkSafe to provide leadership on this issue and stronger, sector-wide leadership to work more closely together with health services and Ambulance Victoria to fulfil their responsibilities as employers to effectively protect staff.

For the safety and security of our dedicated healthcare staff, I hope these recommendations are fully

implemented and acted on swiftly, because no-one should feel unsafe at work. No-one should feel their wellbeing is being put in jeopardy. I thank all those who worked on this report for bringing this important issue to the Parliament's attention. I commend this report to the house.

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2015–16

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — Today I rise to speak on the state budget papers and in particular the local government output summarised on page 197. In doing so I want to draw the attention of the community very much to the plight of peri-urban councils. The peri-urban rural councils are an extremely important group of councils, and I pay tribute to their tenacity and preparedness to advocate strongly for their communities. They comprise the shires of Surf Coast, Golden Plains, Moorabool, Macedon Ranges, Murrindindi, Baw Baw and Bass Coast. The peri-urban council group has been very active in advocating for the situation of peri-urban rural councils, which are those located near to Melbourne — within 1 hour or so of Melbourne — and representing areas that are significant in terms of tourist activity, population growth, in most cases, and also development.

In that context I note that state government support for peri-urban councils has fallen this year. We have seen an \$88 million statewide cut balanced only by a \$50 million injection for the interface councils. The peri-urban rural group gets nothing from that. That is the group that suffers particularly from the removal of the \$40 million per year country roads and bridges program. Each one of these councils would have benefited from \$1 million a year over the last four years, but this year the new state government has cut funding to these councils. In fact it has cut funding to all 40 rural councils, but in particular each of the shire councils in the peri-urban rural group has had that \$1 million per year funding cut due to the abolition of the country roads and bridges program.

As I said, these are areas of significant growth. The population of the peri-urban region is expected to grow by 50.2 per cent by 2031. A statement I made last week was very much to say that the peri-urban councils ought to be included and more strongly recognised in the revamp of *Plan Melbourne*. The old Melbourne 2030 planning document that was operational under the Bracks and Brumby governments did not recognise peri-urban rural councils at all, and I pay tribute to Matthew Guy, who as Minister for Planning saw the need to formally recognise them in the statewide document *Plan Melbourne*, which applied to

Melbourne but also to many of the regional cities, the interface councils and that peri-urban rural group.

The rewrite that is occurring now, which appears to be gathering steam as an even more substantial rewrite, needs to recognise fully and directly the importance of the peri-urban rural group of councils. There needs to be adequate recognition financially too, but importantly that document which looks to the future ought to in a bipartisan way have very strong recognition.

In the Golden Plains area Bannockburn is one example. There we will see an average growth rate of 8.68 per cent per annum through to 2031 or an estimated total of 173.6 per cent through that period. There needs to be recognition of the infrastructure needs and the challenges of roads and local infrastructure in that Bannockburn area of the Golden Plains shire.

In the case of Bass Coast 131 per cent growth is predicted by 2036. Again there is a significant need to recognise that. In Baw Baw it is estimated there will be 115.2 per cent growth by 2036. Warragul, a major growing area that needs recognition, was provided with significant recognition in *Plan Melbourne*, but that needs to be maintained and expanded. In Gisborne in the Macedon Ranges municipality there is a plan for 87.3 per cent growth to 2036, and that also deserves adequate recognition. The town of Maddingley in Moorabool is predicted to see 253 per cent growth to 2036. That is an example of a community that deserves that recognition and has not been provided with it by the state government. All the indications are that the planning minister is determined to rebuff the peri-urban group of councils and not recognise them adequately. Murrindindi, which was so hard hit by the fires in 2009, is well positioned to accommodate additional population growth, and I know that would be welcomed by that peri-urban rural council.

My point here is that the new planning document, whatever it is ultimately called, needs to properly recognise the peri-urban group of councils and in doing so call on the planning minister to make that recognition. I know that at Bannockburn in Golden Plains — —

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

Auditor-General: *Regional Growth Fund — Outcomes and Learnings*

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — This afternoon I would like to make some comments in

relation to the Auditor-General's report, *Regional Growth Fund — Outcomes and Learnings*.

Ms Pulford — That's an interesting read.

Ms TIERNEY — It is a very sorry tale indeed, Minister Pulford. The Auditor-General found that under the Liberal-Nationals government the Regional Growth Fund had weaknesses in design, a lack of transparency and weaknesses in evaluation. It had significant funds to invest in regional Victoria, and that in itself is a good thing, but it is not a good thing when the projects have no paperwork in the pre-application process or when recommendations are declined but the minister overrules those decisions despite there being no paperwork and no minutes of meetings in which those decisions were made.

This report found that there was no evidence around how proposals were even short-listed — none at all. This lack of transparency leads to the question of effectiveness, and once again the Auditor-General found a murky picture. This explains some of the outrageous claims we have heard from those opposite about the effectiveness of the Regional Growth Fund. The accounting practices were shabby, the reporting practices were shambolic and the effectiveness measurements had no basis in reality. The Auditor-General is quoted as saying:

There were also some weaknesses in governance, with independent assessment committees seemingly 'rubberstamping' projects for approval. These issues persist despite the department managing significant grant-based programs for well over a decade. As a result, it was difficult to ascertain whether the best possible projects were funded under the RGF. This also brings into question whether the state achieved the best value for money for its investment in regional Victoria.

On page 11 under the heading 'Findings' the report says:

Pre-application processes were not well documented.

A robust evaluation framework was not effectively developed and implemented.

Performance measures were neither effectively developed nor monitored.

There was a general lack of targets, benchmarks and baseline data for performance measures.

On page 29 under the heading 'Findings' the report says:

Most reported job and investment outcomes are inflated and not an accurate reflection of the RGF contribution.

The department did not report on all outcomes of the RGF.

The department did not have benchmarks and targets for all programs. In cases where these were available these were not consistently applied.

Time constrains me, but suffice to say that this report is damning of the processes around the Regional Growth Fund. They were opaque, and inappropriate measurement techniques were used. The claims made about the fund were grossly overblown.

I am pleased to report that the Auditor-General says the department is applying the lessons learnt from these failures of the Regional Growth Fund and that they are now being applied to the Andrews Labor government's Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. He reports that this includes developing stronger evaluation frameworks with regular reviews and a greater focus on performance reporting and collecting baseline data.

In response to Ms Bath I simply say that Labor will not be taking money out of the regions, including the region she represents. In fact there is more money attached to Labor's regional programs and funds. What I can also say to Ms Bath is that while the local projects she mentioned in her contribution are probably significant and successful projects, they are so despite the significant flaws in the previous fund.

No community needs to put up with this. Labor does not want communities to have to deal with the likes of an inefficient fund that lacks accountability and transparency. I call on all MPs to take the time to read this report. It is enlightening, and it shows how not to do it. We need to do more to support regional Victoria. I commend this report to the house.

Victorian small business commissioner: report 2014–15

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to be able make a contribution on the Victorian small business commissioner's 2014–15 annual report. In fact this hard copy is quite a rarity, given it is the only one in the table office. I was only allowed to have it on the premise that they tag it to be returned in 1 hour. I thank the table office for allowing me to have the only hard copy of this annual report for my contribution tonight.

I want to make two points about the report. The first is the significant increase in mediation work that the Office of the Victorian Small Business Commissioner has done over the last year. There has been a 41 per cent increase in mediation work, which is really quite significant given the office has seen a reduction in its budget. It is important that the government notes the considerable increase in the workload of the office and applies a funding mechanism within the budget to allow

it to continue to deal with the many mediation activities it undertakes.

I was particularly interested to note the farm debt mediation work the office conducts. It was a coalition government initiative to create a division within the small business commissioner's office to deal with farmers and creditors in relation to farm debt before it gets to a point where, particularly for farmers who are facing significant financial challenges, creditors take positions of forcing the sale of assets. It has been very successful, with 90 farm debt mediations having been undertaken by the office over the last 12 months. It is really pleasing to see that while 84 mediations were initiated by creditors, there has been a 95.5 per cent settlement rate of those mediations. It is good news for the farming community that there have been no foreclosures in respect of the mediation work that the office has done, at least in 95 per cent of the cases. Fifty-seven of those mediations were held in regional Victoria. The work is not undertaken only in the office in Melbourne — more cases were conducted in regional Victoria, which certainly would help and complement the process for those farmers who had to go through mediation.

As we are talking about small business, I want to talk about the work my office has done in the last month or so in surveying many small businesses through the Colac and Bellarine region in relation to the impact of the two new gazetted holidays, particularly and specifically the grand final eve holiday. It is interesting to note that from the 1400 survey forms we sent out to small businesses in the Bellarine, the greatest response was that they did not support the public holiday. In the few minutes I have left I would like to refer to some of the comments that came back in those surveys:

Costs of paying employees and loss of income — we are a 24/7 business. I believe in some holidays but not for football.

Disruption of work progress as my subcontractors are all union affiliated and won't work on public holidays unless they are paid 2.5 times normal rates.

It will cost us approximately \$2000 to \$3000 in lost revenue plus wages.

This, along with other public holidays hugely impact on cash flow.

Having to cut staff back as I can't afford to pay wages, or close for the day.

The actual date falls on our National Works and Engineering Conference — this will affect all of our suppliers, sponsors and delegates ...

We work long hours every week, we now also have to work the public holidays as the staff want the holiday and also if

they were to work, the double-time-and-a-half pay is not worth opening.

The loss of revenue in both my stores on the Bellarine and wages will cost the business in excess of \$6000.

High cost of wages, no scheduled deliveries of goods, no service providers — everyone else will have a holiday at great expense to the economy and the frustration of the hospitality industry ...

We will lose in excess of \$25 000 in lost production plus we will pay out \$5500 plus WorkCover, payroll tax et cetera in wages.

The business will close — we will have to pay our three full-time staff for the day and another two casual employees won't be given the opportunity to work on Friday, 2 October.

It will be tough to make up the lost income to our company — Andrews has no idea what is going on in small business.

We will close for the day to avoid paying penalty rates but will still most likely have to pay overtime rates on days prior to get all jobs out.

It is all about the costs of paying employees and lost income — I could go on and on. In Bannockburn where I did a shop walk the story was the same. Many of those businesses are family owned and have small numbers of employees, but unfortunately those families will not be employing those employees on that day. They will be bringing in alternative staff members — that is, grandparents and children. Unfortunately the staff miss out, so the holiday had a significant impact on the Bellarine — —

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

Victorian small business commissioner: report 2014–15

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I also rise to speak on the report of the Victorian small business commissioner. I think the small business commissioner is doing a fantastic job. As Mr Ramsay just outlined, the small business commissioner's role is about resolving business disputes. There has been obviously quite an increase in the office's workload, with a 41 per cent increase in mediations. In fact the small business commissioner might find he has a little bit more mediation work to do in the next 12 months because the small business community is certainly in dispute with the Andrews Labor government over the grand final eve public holiday.

I surveyed businesses in the Shepparton Assembly electorate and asked them if they supported the public holiday. The result was an overwhelming no. More

than 95 per cent of the businesses that returned those surveys said that they did not support the public holiday. I could not exactly say that the other more than 4 per cent supported it — many of them said that it just did not affect them because they were a single operator or something so they did not have additional wages to pay and therefore they would just continue to operate as normal.

Some of the responses that came back to me via that survey include:

Why does Labor insist on making it impossible for small business to operate at our busiest times?

I think that is a good point. People were really angry. People do not think that we need an additional public holiday in this state, and they were really angry that it was on a Friday, which is the busiest trading day of the week. Another comment was:

I have had about enough. I am seriously thinking of closing the door.

Another trader said:

The loss alone is in excess of \$10 000 — do I need to say more?

One survey respondent said:

We look after clients all over Australia. The AFL Friday will prevent us from assisting and servicing clients outside Victoria. It is a day of lost productivity for no good reason. An added expense to our business with no return.

Other comments include:

The economy is tough enough without increasing the number of public holidays which will affect small businesses.

And the last one I will quote from the survey responses is:

We will lose money and business too. And because of loss of business we will lose employees too. And after that they will have all the holidays they want.

A retailer from Shepparton contacted me via Facebook over the weekend and said:

Wendy, when next in Parliament please express my and many other small business owners utter disgust at the Andrews government's decision to grant the Friday holiday before the grand final.

As a fashion retailer I could not have asked for better weather to create sales and ultimately money in my cash register.

Due to penalty rates on wages, shoppers unsurety as to what shops would be open, trade today was appalling.

I run a successful business, trading for 49 years, I don't think we have ever lost money by choosing to open our doors as we did today.

These are disgraceful results. I have since run another survey of the mall traders who opened on the grand final holiday to ask them whether it was worth it, and the overwhelming response to that was, 'No, it was not worth it. We lost money'. I asked them whether they would open again next year and the majority of them said that they would not open again next year. They are definitely saying that we have too many public holidays and that this one should be scrapped. A comment on one of the surveys says:

Fewer foot traffic due to people staying home. Banks closed, directly affected sales between 80–90 per cent less!!
Completely unneeded holiday, as it is not anything even important!

Another comment states:

Could not have staff so I had to work and we lost in sales about \$2000. Thanks.

A third one stated that gross profit was down from \$3200 to \$237, which is a loss of \$2963, but overheads increased as normal. Penalties paid for staff volunteering to work cost \$800. They would normally have six staff but they had four staff, but it was a \$3763 cost to that business. These are direct losses to the owners of the businesses. This comes right off their bottom line. It affects their profits, so that family had \$3763 less coming into the household for the week, and many others were even worse off, as I quoted, with one having \$10 000 in losses. The government should listen to small business and next year it should scrap the Grand Final Friday public holiday.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Max Parkinson Lodge

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, and it is regarding the Max Parkinson Lodge in Wangaratta and a possible future partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services, the Rural City of Wangaratta and Rural Housing Network Ltd to re-establish the lodge as an affordable housing option. My request of the minister is that he commit to working with the Rural City of Wangaratta and the Rural Housing Network to

ensure that Max Parkinson Lodge can be refurbished to house those in greatest need in Wangaratta.

Max Parkinson Lodge is a purpose-built eight-bedroom residential facility and it was jointly funded by the Rural City of Wangaratta and the then Department of Human Services — council provided the land and the department provided the building. It was built in 1969 and comprises almost 1.4 hectares of land, which backs onto One Mile Creek.

The facility was operated as St Johns Village until 2000 and later operated as a disability day activity centre. It has been vacant since 2009, and council has continued to provide maintenance on the property at a cost of approximately \$12 000 per annum. However, the lodge is in dire need of investment and major refurbishment so it can once again be used to house those in greatest need. I understand that council has been in discussion with the department regarding the future of Max Parkinson Lodge, so the minister should be well aware of the facility and the complications. Council has also recently been in discussions with the Rural Housing Network, which has advised that it is interested in examining the possibility of taking the lodge on under a lease arrangement. While a potential partnership is still in its infancy, Rural Housing has stated that because the current facility is of rooming house design, the lodge will need to be either demolished and reconstructed or completely refurbished.

Rural Housing has also advised that it might be possible for the organisation to put some capital funding into the building, to allow it to once again be used for housing. Under the terms of the funding agreement, which has strict terms about any transfer in ownership of the property, council is unable to transfer the facility to a housing association without incurring a financial penalty. A further complication of the funding agreement is that the Wangaratta Rural City Council would be required to pay \$351 000 to the director of housing. This is currently a no-win situation that could be turned into a win-win situation with a little flexibility on the government's behalf. In the meantime there is a desperate need for affordable housing in Wangaratta, and it is frustrating to everyone that this facility cannot be used to assist those in greatest need.

As at June this year, the public housing waiting list for Wangaratta had 252 families waiting for housing, including 44 listed for early housing. Any initiatives that the Victorian government can assist with to reduce these figures should be given due consideration by the minister. The Max Parkinson Lodge partnership with the Rural Housing Network is an initiative that can provide outcomes to assist those on the waiting list. My

request of the minister is that he commit to working with the Rural City of Wangaratta and the Rural Housing Network to ensure that Max Parkinson Lodge can be refurbished to house those in greatest need in Wangaratta.

Pakenham ministerial visit

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. I ask the minister to come with me to Pakenham to visit members of the small business community to discuss opportunities for growth in the area and also to discuss any challenges that they are facing. Pakenham is one of the fastest growing areas within our state. It is currently home to a population of around 35 000 people, and according to some projections it will grow over the coming two decades to a population of over 100 000 people. It is a very young and diverse population. It provides a wide range of opportunities in a large number of sectors.

In the retail sector Pakenham is already home to four Woolworth stores, four Coles, an Aldi, a Mitre 10 and a range of other very large retail outlets, yet the retail market in Pakenham is also large enough to provide opportunities for small businesses. There are hundreds of small businesses in the retail sector in Pakenham already, so it is an interesting environment in which to explore how to support small businesses to take advantage of opportunities. Clearly there are challenges in that they are having to compete with very large businesses. They are having to deal with a lot of macroeconomic instability, as are small businesses right around the state and indeed the country. With such rapid population growth in prospect, there are clearly lots of opportunities. Of course those opportunities are not just in retail but also in a whole range of other sectors, including professional services, education and the burgeoning health sector.

I look forward to the minister coming to visit. We will make sure there is a representative sample of small businesses present and that we canvass fully the wide range of issues that they wish to raise.

Small business innovation programs

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade a matter that relates to representations I have received from Mr Terry Lancaster of eHat Systems seeking advice from the government with respect to the Victorian government's innovation programs to support and assist businesses

with development, particularly new products, services and innovations. Mr Lancaster has written to me indicating that he has previously written to the Premier, who is also his local member in the Assembly seat of Mulgrave, seeking advice with respect to the government's programs for innovation, and that correspondence to the Premier has gone unanswered. He is particularly disappointed that his local member, the Premier, has not responded, but more particularly he is concerned at the apparent lack of innovation programs the Victorian government now has to support innovative Victorian businesses.

Mr Lancaster writes that he thought the voucher program that was sponsored by the previous government was an important way to support innovation and development in small business in this state and he was disappointed to be advised by the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources that that program, along with all the other programs of the previous government, has been halted and no new programs have been put in place. That was the most recent advice that Mr Lancaster had from the department in the absence of any response from his local member, the Premier.

Therefore on behalf of Mr Lancaster I ask the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade whether he can advise Mr Lancaster of what current innovation programs the government has in place, given that it has stopped the voucher program and other innovation programs that were in existence under the previous government, so that Mr Lancaster can get on with the development of his business. In his correspondence he says it is ridiculous that those programs have been cancelled and that we could have a \$1 billion a year new business but he cannot get a hand to even get started. That highlights his frustration at the lack of clarity from the government as to its programs.

I ask the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade to have his department contact Mr Lancaster at eHat Systems and advise him of the current suite of innovation programs available to support small business in Victoria.

Warrnambool ministerial visit

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Training and Skills. The action I seek from the minister is for him to visit Warrnambool in my electorate to see firsthand the issues facing the south-west, in particular the high youth unemployment rate, and to discuss what actions the Andrews

government can take to improve job opportunities for all Victorians.

Western Victoria is a vast region which takes in large regional towns, including Warrnambool, and the slightly smaller towns of Portland and Hamilton. Unemployment and school attainment is of great concern to many community members. In the south-west region unemployment under the previous government skyrocketed. Sadly as a result we are now facing extremely high unemployment rates. In fact youth unemployment has risen above 20 per cent. The south-west region has very low education attainment rates which, coupled with high rates of teen pregnancy, risks seeing the unemployment rate continue to be an outlying figure in comparison to the rest of the state.

I strongly believe it is the role of government to support those who are the most disadvantaged and not abandon them and make things more difficult by limiting their opportunities, as was the practice of the previous government. I look forward to the minister visiting Warrnambool with me to discuss this very important matter further.

Witness assistance service staff

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Attorney-General. It relates to recent reports in the *Age* and some information about the same topic that has come to me from other sources regarding three witness assistance service staff of the Office of Public Prosecutions who have been stood down. By way of background, the witness assistance service staff employed by the Office of Public Prosecutions do some very challenging work assisting victims of crime through the court process. They help witnesses who are dealing with the courts and the justice system to navigate their way through their obligations, their challenges and the stress that sometimes can be caused as a result of being caught up in that process.

Three of these staff prepared a submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence drawing on their many years of experience in dealing with matters that are pertinent to the royal commission's terms of reference. They did so on a confidential basis and made what have been reported as common-sense recommendations that were not disparaging to their employer or to others but merely brought attention to their front-line experience in dealing with some of these issues.

These three staff have been stood down and charged with breaches of the code of conduct for Victorian

public sector employees, and this has caused them, as I understand it, a great deal of distress. I note the comments of the secretary of Police Association Victoria, Ron Iddles, who is reported in the *Age* today as saying:

Our members have had a lot to do with these women over the years, particularly detectives from the homicide squad and major collisions, and they provide great support for victims and witnesses under extremely difficult circumstances.

I can't believe this can't be worked out, instead of standing these women down.

I think Ron Iddles has summarised the issue quite well. I ask the Attorney-General to investigate this matter to see what he can do to resolve it. On the face of it and from the facts that are available in the public domain this seems to be a peculiar situation. I think it would be in the interests of everyone if it could be resolved as soon as possible.

Morwell tech school

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — The matter I wish to raise this evening is for the Minister for Education, Mr Merlino. It follows a visit I paid on Monday, 28 September, to the Knox Innovation Opportunity and Sustainability Centre, or KIOSC as it is known. It is the overall blueprint for the tech schools which have been announced and are being delivered as part of the Andrews government commitment to improving education and as part of an overall record spend on education and educational opportunities across Victoria.

It is a matter of significant importance that Gippsland will be receiving one of these 10 pilot schools, and I have been pleased to participate in a number of consultative meetings with the community and stakeholders around how the tech school should look. Having seen firsthand the project offerings, the course delivery and the various priorities that have been generated at KIOSC in Wantirna, I ask that the minister give consideration to allowing additional funding, as required, so that the technological and programmatic options can be made available for the tech school in Morwell as and when it is completed and to ensure that students from Gippsland are best able to access the same educational opportunities as their counterparts in peri-urban and suburban Melbourne to ensure that they, too, have the future opportunities for growth and development across further vocational study and/or practical trade options.

Western Victoria Region tourism

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — The matter I raise tonight is for the Minister for Tourism and Major Events. Western Victoria is a region with some unique Indigenous attributes that have the potential to be major drivers of tourism in the region. I would like to draw attention to two in particular, both being in the Gunditjmara region.

The first is Tower Hill, which is an extinct volcanic crater formed some 20 000 years ago. In that area you can undertake some self-guided walking trails with different themes. It has a historic centre which was designed by noted architect Robin Boyd. Tower Hill was the first national park in Victoria, after having been saved from clearing and made a public park in 1866. It has been replanted and now has an Indigenous garden in the area, and the Indigenous Gunditjmara group who look after it will do traditional Aboriginal food from the plantings they have and from some of the other areas of western Victoria.

The second is the Lake Condah area. Budj Bim has the oldest aquaculture system in the world. It is some 8000 years old. It was probably the first settled area of Aborigines in Australia. They designed a system where the eels would be trapped in the waterways and they would then harvest them over the coming year. Many of the stone huts that were built still exist, as does the aquaculture system that was in existence at the time. As I said, that is 8000 years old. The Gunditjmara group has retained Budj Bim and started to redevelop some of these areas. At the moment it is difficult to get into that area without the permission of the traditional owners, even though they are quite receptive to people visiting.

I ask the minister to take the train to Warrnambool and then join me in visiting and viewing these unique attractions to consider how we can further develop them as major tourist drivers for our region.

Public holidays

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, and I ask the minister to commit to abandoning any future grand final parade public holidays due to the impact the holiday has on small businesses right across the state. Labor undertook a regulatory impact statement (RIS), and the RIS paints a very clear picture of the significant economic burden that this new holiday creates. The RIS says that:

Overall, the estimated costs of the new public holidays outweigh the quantified benefits ...

The statement goes on to try to quantify those benefits. The cost in terms of lost production is \$898 million and the cost of increased wage payments is up to \$286 million. It goes on to say that employers will initially bear the costs of additional wages and weaker demand. However, the increase in wages will be passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices for goods and services — clearly everybody loses under this policy. The RIS does say that there are benefits from accrued leisure time, but that ranges from \$156 million to \$312 million a year, which is clearly a lot less than the massive cost burden of the holiday, particularly on small businesses in the state.

I have surveyed many people in my electorate, particularly in the Eltham area, and today I tabled a petition with over 330 signatures from the people in the Eltham area saying that they did not think that this public holiday was a good idea and it should not be continued. I have also surveyed thousands of small businesses in the Eltham area, and 98 per cent support the non-continuation of this holiday. The terms they have used include ‘populist’, ‘inconvenient’, ‘no consultation’, ‘increased costs’, ‘less staff’, ‘fewer hours’, ‘surcharges’, ‘penalty rates’ and ‘closed doors’. Those are the strong messages from small business owners in Eltham.

I quote one small business owner who, in response to the survey, said:

It is already hard enough to maintain a cost-effective business paying penalty rates to staff. This decision will affect our cash flow and ability to run a successful business. This is yet another burden put onto small businesses who already struggle with increasing costs and staff entitlements. This has now given reason for another disincentive to run your own small business.

Clearly this is a government that is driving small business out of business because of the costs it is imposing on them. This policy of the Labor Party is having a dramatic impact. I implore the minister to listen to Victorians, particularly those in the Eltham area and those who are small business owners in that area, and acknowledge that without a holiday the grand final parade has attracted tens of thousands of Victorians each and every year for the last 38 years. We do not need more public holidays, particularly ones that make Victoria and Victorians worse off.

Men’s sheds

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Families and Children, Jenny Mikakos, and I take licence to compliment her on the great job she is doing. The matter pertains to a visit I made last week to the

Waterford Park retirement village in Knoxfield, which is a great facility — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LEANE — To answer the interjections, I did not feel like leaving. It is a great facility. There are some men and women there who have set up a men's shed where they produce some great wooden toys for charities and a number of other things, and they really enjoy the activity that brings them. The action I seek from the minister is for her to ask her staff to let me know of any future improvement grants that may be directed towards men's sheds.

Murray Basin rail project

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport and relates to the Andrews government's now apparent reliance on the federal government to fund the Murray Basin rail project. Back in February the Andrews government misled regional Victorians by reannouncing the Murray Basin rail project, suggesting new money was being pumped into regional Victoria. By reannouncing the Liberal-Nationals coalition's Murray Basin rail project as its own, the Andrews government tried to hoodwink regional Victoria.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — Yes, I thought Ms Shing would like the pun. Labor's contribution to the Murray Basin rail project is absolutely nought — no dollars. The project was already funded in the 2014–15 budget by the coalition from the proceeds of the Rural Finance Corporation sale. The Andrews government again misled country communities by reannouncing the new \$200 million from the Rural Finance Corporation's sale as new money for regional Victoria when we know it was not. All the government announced was a \$416 million option for the Murray Basin rail project. It has not put one cent into the project, and it is now relying on the federal government to pick up the tab. The government has plenty of form for announcing projects by using already allocated budget expenditure or getting private enterprise to fully fund infrastructure, and I refer to the western distributor with Transurban.

The coalition government committed the full proceeds of the sale of the Rural Finance Corporation of \$420 million to regional Victoria infrastructure. Some \$220 million was allocated in the budget for the Murray Basin rail project and \$200 million to other regional

infrastructure projects. That was all previous government money.

The Andrews government needs to commit to the complete Murray Basin rail project. Without a full commitment to this project, the government is selling regional Victoria short. The scope of this project designed by the coalition included upgrades to the Mildura to Maryborough and Murtoa to Hopetoun rail lines and full track standardisation between Mildura and Geelong. This project is vital for Victoria's western and northern regions, by enabling higher axle loadings and reducing travel times for freight. With over \$3 billion worth of food products and mineral resources exported from the Murray Basin each year, the coalition made this vital investment in upgrading the freight rail track in regional Victoria. Instead of relying on funding from the federal government the minister should be lobbying her state colleagues to fully fund this important infrastructure.

The action I seek from the minister is for the government to fully commit the \$420 million to fund the Murray Basin rail project and not play games with the federal government — one-upmanship that will no doubt delay this very important project for regional Victoria.

Drought assistance

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Agriculture. Many of us are aware that the recent hot weather, coupled with reduced rainfall and subsoil moisture at a critical stage of crop growth, has substantially impacted the crops of farmers in northern Victoria. The full impact of the hot weather will become clearer by the end of this week or next week. However, some farmers are looking at a second poor season in a row, exacerbating the impact of these dry conditions. The Bureau of Meteorology declared earlier this year that the conditions were present for an El Niño forming, bringing drier than average spring seasons and warmer daytime temperatures. This is very worrying for those on the land and the communities they are connected to.

I understand that information and support is being provided to farmers on how to manage dry seasonal conditions, including the responsible management of livestock. Workshops have been held throughout the season supporting farmers to make the best possible decisions about how to manage the dry conditions. I know the minister is working with the commonwealth to ensure that the range of commonwealth programs for drought assistance continue to be delivered to those

most in need. We encourage farmers in financial distress to seek support, including the commonwealth Farm Household Allowance. The Rural Financial Counselling Service is also available to provide support to farmers in stress, and it can assist with accessing the range of services available.

The action I seek is that the minister visit my region to hear from farmers about the situations they are facing, their experiences relating to the existing supports and their ideas on what role they see the government may have going forward.

Wonthaggi hospital

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, Jill Hennessy, and it is in regard to the Wonthaggi hospital. I recently visited the hospital and met with Bass Coast Health CEO Veronica Jamison and board member Peter Laydon, who showed me the hospital's master plan, which requires in the vicinity of \$200 million to upgrade the hospital to a subregional standard. Stage 1 of this plan was completed in 2014 by Mr Davis as health minister and the coalition government, with a new state-of-the-art facility provided for allied health and dental services for the community.

Before last year's election the coalition government committed another \$25 million to fund the expansion of the rehabilitation and community health services. I visited the building, and unfortunately it is substandard. It was built in 1920, before the Second World War. The services provided in the facility include family counselling, and it often helps to support the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Whilst the care is excellent, the environment in which the service operates is far from perfect.

Bass Coast is a growth area. Its normal population is around 35 000 people, but during the summer period and at holiday time it is up to 100 000 people. The current hospital's 24-hour emergency department is situated at the back of the building, so people have to navigate their way through to get to the emergency department, and I have done that with my son.

I have said before that the care by the staff is fantastic and of a high quality, but the building and infrastructure is in need of attention. Also of concern is the healthcare provider's Armitage House, a 30-bed nursing home on the same site as the hospital. The four beds to a room set-up in most of the rooms is far from ideal, and it is in need of attention in order to be sustainable going forward. Whilst the care given is of the highest quality, the layout of the building means that the overall service

provided to the community is unsustainable in its current form. It is vital that this government support the Wonthaggi hospital's strategic plan, which is in stages, to ensure better health options for people living in and visiting the Bass Coast area. Therefore I request that the minister meet with the hospital's CEO and board to see for herself the current infrastructure and to discuss future funding opportunities.

Local government legislation review

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. The minister has launched a review of the Local Government Act 1989. The coalition welcomes the general review of the act but expresses extreme concern about some aspects of it. I draw the chamber's attention to the discussion paper that has been released, particularly chapter 3, and I draw particular attention to page 32. At table 2 it lays out the voting franchise for local government in some detail, noting that the City of Melbourne has a slightly different franchise.

One of the issues that is directly canvassed, and perhaps the highlight of the page, is the example given:

The Queensland council franchise, like state and commonwealth Parliaments, confers no additional voting entitlement on property ownership.

The question is posed — and this is an area where the Labor Party has form, given its activities back in the 1980s:

Should only voters on the state roll be entitled to vote at council elections?

This is going to significantly upset many small business owners and small property owners across the state. They have significant investments in particular council areas, and on the principle of no taxation without representation they ought to be entitled to have a vote. We seek from the minister a commitment that this will not be part of the government's review and will not be part of any new legislation that comes forward, because this would strike very much at the heart of small business. We already have an anti-small business government. Daniel Andrews as Premier has been targeting small business, most recently on the grand final eve public holiday. I think his phrase was, 'These were just business types who were complaining and whingeing'. He is dismissive and arrogant, and he does not understand small business.

Small businesses are part of local communities, investing locally and providing local jobs. Property and business investment of course is also relatively illiquid

and cannot easily be moved should a hostile local council be elected. The disenfranchisement of business ratepayers would remove a current restraint on councils seeking to jack up business rates, and we have seen examples of this around the state in recent times, including at Monash City Council, with 11 per cent in one year, which is far too much.

Local government voting is in fact different from voting in state and federal elections, for while every — —

Ms Shing — Are you reading?

Mr DAVIS — I am reading my notes. While everyone is affected by the outcome of state and federal elections, a vote in another municipality in which you can have no say could have adverse effects on your property or business. The Minister for Local Government needs to rule out the implementation of this tampering with the business franchise — with the franchise for local government elections. It is antibusiness. Taxation without representation is where this government is heading, and I ask the minister to rule it out absolutely.

Grange Road, Carnegie, pedestrian crossing

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It is an issue that has been raised with me by a constituent concerning the intersection of Grange Road and Oakleigh Road in Carnegie. This is an extremely busy crossroad, and it is an issue that I understand has been raised before with different levels of government. The resident who raised this with me is very concerned about people attempting to cross here. I will use his words from the letter he sent to me:

There is a kindergarten directly across Grange Road, not to mention schools and childcare centres, all of which have families that live across Grange Road. For anyone with mobility issues, be it disabled, elderly pensioner or young children, this is an almost impossible place to cross. I am aware that there are crossings at Glen Huntly Primary School and North Road; however, when mobility is an issue these are much too far away.

He went on to say that he thinks a set of traffic lights or possibly a pedestrian crossing is needed at this intersection. While we were standing there we saw a good example of the problem in practice. The road was very busy, with traffic whizzing by, and people eventually attempted quite an unsafe dash across the road, both in cars or on foot. You can see exactly how accidents happen.

I understand that this is a designated black spot. I am also told that there is no real consensus as to what the solution is. I am seeking some advice from the minister about any existing assessments of this intersection and how it might be fixed. I am also seeking some advice on what is the most appropriate response to enable safe crossing on foot at this intersection and what the time frame may be for any action.

Sunbury community

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Premier. On 7 November last year the then opposition shadow Minister for Local Government, Richard Wynne, said of the separation of Sunbury from the City of Hume:

... the separation has been gazetted ... and the matter has been finalised.

The then candidate for the Assembly seat of Sunbury, now the member for Sunbury, Josh Bull, said on 17 November 2014 that he supported Sunbury out of Hume, but by all indications, that was not the case at all. This government has gone to extraordinary lengths to frustrate the separation, to keep Sunbury in Hume and to break its pre-election promise to the people of Sunbury.

Despite my best efforts to have the roundabout at the corner of Gap Road and Horne Street in Sunbury removed and replaced with traffic lights, the government has responded with nothing but indecision. I cannot get an answer out of the minister on this particularly dangerous intersection. It is endangering the lives and safety of local people. Every day when I go through it I consider myself very lucky to succeed.

Labor promised the people of Sunbury that when the electrification of the Sunbury line was complete, the people of Sunbury would be able to keep the V/Line services that serviced their community. Not only is the government preparing to back away from that promise but the people of Sunbury now face fines of up to \$500 for daring to board a V/Line train.

My attempt to have Sunbury Road duplicated has been dismissed out of hand. Of course this road is very dangerous, and congestion on it is quite horrendous at times.

The reason I bring these matters to the attention of the Premier is to ask him this: to stop the war on Sunbury. This government is kicking Sunbury from pillar to post, and it must stop. I ask the Premier, plead with the Premier if I must, to direct his ministers to stop the war on Sunbury and to give the people of Sunbury a fair go.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I rule that out as an adjournment item. To call on the Premier to stop the war on a suburb is just not an adjournment matter that the minister is required to respond to.

Mr Finn — On a point of order, President, you are denying me as an elected member of Parliament the right to represent my constituents in this place to the Premier.

Ms Mikakos — No, it is about following the rules of the adjournment debate.

Mr Ondarchie — You're not the President!

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Mikakos is not the President, but I will take up exactly what she said. It is about following the rules of the adjournment debate, which Mr Finn is actually more conversant with than most. He has got it on the record. He can represent his community as much as he likes. But it is not a proper matter for the adjournment debate, and Mr Finn knows it.

Mr Finn — I do not believe that.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Finn cannot possibly make the comment, 'Stop the war on Sunbury'. It is rhetoric. It is not a question.

Mr Finn — It is representation.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It is not a question.

Country football and netball program

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I was hoping the Minister for Sport could stop the war on footy, but I will not say that. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Sport, and it has to do with the country football and netball program. Most ministers would now be in the advanced stages of proposing budgets for their portfolios for the 2015–16 year. I suppose they are going through their various processes to work out with Treasury what will be in and out of next year's budget, so the timing of my request that the Minister for Sport reinstate in the next three years of the budget the country football and netball program is important. This program was a Labor Party initiative many years ago. It was taken to another level of investment by the coalition during its four years. It was left out of the budget in May this year but was announced with all the other announcements, even though there is no mention of the country football and netball program within the budget.

The minister was recently in Bendigo to open a facility that the coalition funded while I was the minister. I caught the last bit of the minister on television talking to the listening and viewing audience about how this program is critically important to country football and netball clubs. I call on the minister to start negotiations, because whilst this program is predominantly funded by the state, it also receives funding from the AFL, the AFL Victoria country division and Netball Victoria. These parties are all keen to engage in ongoing arrangements, but they need to get their own contributions for the next three years put into their own budgets.

I call on the Minister for Sport to recommit to this program which has been in place for well over 10 years now — it was taken out of the last budget but is still going on a one-year arrangement — and give the various football and netball clubs around the state the comfort of knowing that there is a program out there specifically for them, as there has been for well over 10 years now. I call on the minister to either come clean and tell Victorians that the government is going to abolish this program so that clubs can look elsewhere for their funding or reinstate it in the next three budgets and their respective out years.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Drum makes a good point. He could well have said, 'Stop the war on football', Ms Wooldridge could have said, 'Stop the war on small business' and someone else could have said, 'Stop the war on hospitals'. Members know what the form of the adjournment debate is, and I think that was pretty inappropriate.

Responses

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — Thank you very much, President, and I thank you for your earlier ruling.

I received a number of adjournment matters this evening: from Ms Lovell for the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing; from Mr Mulino for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade; from Mr Rich-Phillips for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation, and Trade; from Ms Tierney for the Minister for Training and Skills; from Mr O'Donohue for the Attorney-General — and I understand that matter has been resolved.

I received adjournment matters from Ms Shing for the Minister for Education; from Mr Purcell for the Minister for Tourism and Major Events; from Ms Wooldridge for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation, and Trade, and I note Mr Drum suggested

that it may now be coalition policy to scrap the grand final public holiday — I am not sure what the status of that is.

I received adjournment matters from Mr Ramsay for the Minister for Public Transport; from Ms Symes for the Minister for Agriculture; from Ms Bath for the Minister for Health; from Mr Davis for the Minister for Local Government; from Ms Fitzherbert for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; and from Mr Drum for the Minister for Sport.

I will direct all those adjournment matters to the relevant ministers for response.

Mr Leane raised a matter with me, and I propose to discharge that matter this evening. Mr Leane referred to his recent visit to the Waterford Park retirement village in Knoxfield and his meeting with passionate individuals at that centre. Mr Leane particularly requested that I advise him as to the details of any future men's shed funding rounds. Mr Leane is a passionate advocate for his electorate and in particular men's sheds.

I can advise Mr Leane that our government is committed to men's sheds. Last month 15 organisations from right across the state received grants to establish new men's sheds. This is a great initiative which enables men of all ages to participate in activities that not only enable them to acquire new skills they may not otherwise acquire but also provides them with a social outlet and an opportunity to bond socially and perhaps discuss issues amongst themselves that they may not be comfortable discussing with their families.

I know that for men who are socially isolated in our community, particularly in regional communities but also in metropolitan parts of Melbourne, men's sheds provide very important social support. We are committed to funding further men's sheds, and I can advise Mr Leane and other members that there will be a further funding round for men's sheds this financial year. I would be very happy to advise the member of further details of that funding round once those details are confirmed.

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

House adjourned 6.25 p.m.

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Responses are incorporated in the form provided to Hansard

Firearms

Question asked by: Mr Young
Directed to: Minister for Training and Skills
Asked on: 17 September 2015

RESPONSE TO SUBSTANTIVE QUESTION:

Thank you for your question and ongoing interest in the Police and Corrections Portfolio.

I am advised by the Minister for Police and Corrections that yes, the Federal Minister for Justice, Mr Michael Keenan, initiated contact with the Minister for Police, via telephone, regarding the Adler lever action shotgun.

RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

No, I am advised that the Minister for Police did not initiate contact with the Federal Minister for Justice regarding the Adler lever action shotgun.

PrimeSafe board

Question asked by: Mr Drum
Directed to: Minister for Agriculture
Asked on: 6 October 2015

RESPONSE:

The requirements for appointing members to PrimeSafe are prescribed in the Meat Industry Act 1993. Section 48 of the Act provides for PrimeSafe to consist of at least eight and not more than 10 members appointed by the Minister: of whom one is the chairperson; two may be appointed after the Minister has taken into account the balance of areas of expertise held by the members of PrimeSafe appointed under Section 48(2)(d) of the Act; and seven are persons with expertise in specified areas to be appointed after the Minister has considered any recommendation of the Selection Committee.

As required under the Act, the Selection Committee comprised the PrimeSafe Chairperson and four members nominated by industry (seafood, meat processing, livestock producers and poultry processing industries). A recruitment agency was engaged to assist with the process of identifying candidates to be interviewed by the Selection Committee.

As with most appointments to Victorian Government boards, my recommendations pursuant to the Act were considered and endorsed by Cabinet. The PrimeSafe board appointments fulfil the requirements of the Act and the Government's commitment to gender balance on boards. I did not consider it necessary to remove myself from the process.