

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 9 December 2015

(Extract from book 18)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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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*): Ms Bath and Mr Dalla-Riva. (*Assembly*): Ms Blandthorn, Mr J. Bull, Mr Dimopoulos, 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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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
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Dalidakis, Mr Philip	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Patten, Ms Fiona	Northern Metropolitan	ASP
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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
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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, 9 December 2015

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I have given some thought to question time yesterday. I do not want to revisit the whole thing, but let me say that I take a dim view of members being cute with the use of certain words and reflections on other members. In the case of yesterday, it was a reflection on a minister. The member was very close to being ejected from the chamber and not getting a question up. Frankly, if it starts that way again, the member will not get the question up under any circumstances. As I said, I take a very dim view of those sorts of reflections, even when people are being cute in the way they phrase those reflections. It is demeaning to the house.

PETITIONS

Following petition presented to house:

Whitehorse planning scheme amendment

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that:

Whitehorse City Council resolved on 16 March 2015 to abandon amendment C153 and not rezone and overdevelop the old St Leo's school site. The developer appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). VCAT then ruled that council is obliged to submit the adopted amendment to the Minister for Planning.

Whitehorse City Council and the residents of the City of Whitehorse have significant concerns with amendment C153, particularly relating to the intensity of the proposed development, potential impacts on traffic and parking, the safety of local residents and the detrimental effect on neighbourhood character due to the height and scale of the proposed development.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Minister for Planning to reject amendment C153 and the proposed planning permit for the following reasons:

this is one of the few remaining special use and public use zones in the City of Whitehorse and it is imperative that it is not rezoned as residential growth zone and general residential zone. The immediate surrounding area is Gardiners Creek and limited growth bush suburban 3 residential zoning. The proposed rezoning is entirely out of character with the existing family-friendly neighbourhood and the proposed development height of up to seven storeys will have a detrimental effect on Gardiners Creek;

there is no access to an arterial road from the proposed development. This will create insurmountable traffic hazards. This will be dangerous for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists;

it is proposed to be built on land that is prone to flooding and inundation adjacent to Gardiners Creek.

By Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) (193 signatures).

Laid on table.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Victorian government report 2014–15

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade), by leave, presented report.

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on —

East West Link Project, December 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Portfolio Departments and Associated Entities: 2014–15 Audit Snapshot, December 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority — Report, 2014–15.

Commissioner for Privacy and Data Protection — Report, 2014–15 (*Ordered to be published*).

Education and Care Services Ombudsman, National Education and Care Services Freedom of Information and Privacy Commissioners — Report, 2014–15.

Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry — Report, 2015–16, Volume 2 — Investigations into 2009–2014 deaths, pursuant to section 77 of the Inquiries Act 2014 (*Ordered to be published*).

Ombudsman — Reporting and investigation of allegations of abuse in the disability sector: Phase 2 — Incident reporting, December 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule No. 145.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notice of motion given.

Ms HARTLAND having given notice of motion:

The PRESIDENT — Order! I reiterate that usually we try to keep notices of motion fairly short, but with respect to committee references there is a lot of detail the house needs to be aware of for consideration and determination, so a motion of this length in regard to the setting up of a reference is obviously acceptable. There is no problem at all with it in interpretational terms.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS**Regional and rural kindergartens**

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is supporting small rural kindergartens. This week I announced a new funding model for small rural kindergartens that will represent an increased investment of \$500 000 for the smallest kindergartens in rural and regional Victoria. It will provide a funding floor for our very smallest rural kindergartens — those with eight children or less — and for the first time it will index the rate of the small rural grants.

There are many small kindergartens across rural Victoria that struggle financially. This year our two very smallest kindergartens in the state had just two enrolments; one in the west, the Forrest early learning centre in the Colac Otway shire, and one in the east, Buchan Early Childhood Development Centre in Bairnsdale, East Gippsland. For kinders as small as these, the new model will provide over \$30 000 in additional funding support. The new funding model will also help our smallest kinders when they are experiencing fluctuating enrolments from year to year. This funding will ensure that they can stay open and continue operating.

The announcement this week comes on top of the support announced last month to ensure that kindergartens in drought-affected communities remain financially viable and that children in drought-affected communities do not miss out on kindergarten if their parents are doing it tough. It also follows a significant investment in rural Victoria through our children's capital grants. Funding has now been earmarked for integrated children's centres in Horsham and down on the Bass Coast, and nine other projects for new and upgraded early learning facilities across regional Victoria have also been supported.

The Andrews Labor government recognises the challenges faced by kindergarten services in rural communities. This additional support is part of our government's commitment to make Victoria the education state. This means ensuring that high-quality early years education and care is on offer to all Victorian children, regardless of their postcode. From Baw Baw to Buloke, from West Wimmera to Wangaratta, we are ensuring that in the education state all children get the best start in life.

Drought assistance

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — We did not plan this, but continuing on the theme that Ms Mikakos has just been talking about on support for drought-affected communities, I would like to provide the house with an update on the continued rollout across the state of assistance for drought-affected farming communities. As members are no doubt well aware, there are 10 municipalities in Victoria that are particularly affected by dry conditions, and the government is providing support to these communities in a number of different ways. The range of programs being delivered to support these communities include additional access to farming advice, extension services provided through the department, financial counselling, family support, health programs, emotional help and some community events to bring people together in time of great hardship.

Applications for the \$2000 stock containment area grants opened this week for farmers in the Wimmera-Mallee, North Central and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority regions. I can advise the house that as of last night we had received 60 expressions of interest that had been lodged and assessments will commence today. Workshops and information sessions continue to be held across the state to help farmers to plan ahead and to best manage dry conditions. Additional resources have been provided to the Rural Financial Counselling Service, and in addition drought concessional loans are available through Rural Finance.

The government is continuing its conversation with affected communities about the allocation of \$10 million of the \$27 million package. I had a very good discussion with the Victorian Agricultural Advisory Committee, which has been very recently reappointed, last week. For people looking for more information about this, I urge members to pass on to their constituents details about the drought information line on 136186 or the website at www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/drought.

Glenormiston College site

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I am delighted to inform the house of new action regarding the Andrews government's plan to re-establish education and training at the former Glenormiston College in the state's south-west. The campus was used by South-West TAFE. It closed in March 2014 as a result of cuts to TAFE and changes to the way agricultural education was delivered. The

facility was put on the asset disposal list, but upon coming to office I wanted to reconsider this action.

Glenormiston has had a great role in delivering agricultural education in the south-west and in Victoria as a whole. The government has decided to have another go at reopening the facilities. That is why I recently announced an expression of interest (EOI) process to purchase or lease the site, which will be open to both domestic and international operators. The EOI process started on 7 December, and applications will be accepted for 100 days. The EOI will be marketed internationally and will be advertised in local, state and national newspapers. While there may be many uses for the site, education must be a core activity and must continue for 10 years. I am hopeful we will receive compliant bids, but if not then we will have no choice but to put the property back on the asset disposal list.

A probity auditor has been consulted, consultation with the local community will occur and I encourage all interested members, particularly Mr Purcell and Mr Ramsay, who have a genuine interest in the site, to promote innovative new uses for a reopened Glenormiston.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Firefighter cancer compensation

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 30 Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers from the Lara CFA station who attended on Monday night to see me sign a pledge of support for non-discriminatory presumptive legislation for all Victorian firefighters. I will also be signing similar pledges of support at the Drysdale, Wallington, Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads CFA fire stations over the next week. My support will continue through the joint parliamentary Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee, as part of its reference is to provide recommendations for a suitable model of presumptive legislation for Victoria as part of its broader inquiry into the CFA training college at Fiskville.

It is fitting that we acknowledge the important work of our firefighters, and it is also a timely reminder of the difficult fire season ahead. The need to be fire prepared and fire ready was apparent, with a large, uncontrolled fire burning north of Coleraine in western Victoria yesterday. Much of the north is tinder dry, with high fuel loads and low water storage. I say to our firefighters, particularly our volunteers, a big thank you on behalf of our communities. Stay safe over the summer.

Felicitations

Mr RAMSAY — As a final statement for the year, I wish all my parliamentary colleagues a safe and restful season. I also wish the staff at Parliament House, including those in the Legislative Council, a merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous new year.

Greens members

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Today I would like to congratulate the four new Greens members of Parliament at the completion of their first year in state Parliament.

Ellen Sandell, the member for Melbourne in the Assembly, has consistently raised the need for action on climate change and renewable energy. She has also looked at coal exploration licences, environmental approval powers, public housing and other constituency-related issues in the electorate of Melbourne, as well as political donation reform.

Sam Hibbins, the member for Prahran in the Assembly, has raised many issues around public transport, including the South Yarra station upgrade, Melbourne Metro planning and myki issues. He has also championed the issues of public housing in Prahran, equality and political donation reform.

Nina Springle, a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region, has championed issues such as child protection and family violence, including funding; women, including dowries and disabilities; and public housing within the electorate of South Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Samantha Dunn, a member for Eastern Metropolitan Region, has highlighted forest-related issues including the Great Forest National Park, VicForests and the East Gippsland timber industry, as well as the Leadbeater's possum, the Western Highway and Doncaster rail and other public transport issues.

John Parker

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I rise to recognise and pay tribute to John Parker, who passed away last weekend aged 66. Most notably known as the long-time secretary of the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, John will be greatly missed in the Gippsland community and by those across the labour movement. John was a stalwart trade unionist and a dedicated community advocate. He spent some 35 years working with a dogged commitment to social justice. Many describe John as a visionary but also a pragmatist.

Last year the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council created a new award, the John Parker Award for Community Activism, for which John was the namesake and inaugural recipient. John constantly advocated for social reform in Gippsland for workers and retired workers. To drive home this point, in contesting the 2013 federal election he ran 'just transition' forums to develop an economic plan for the Latrobe Valley. These recognised the need to plan for a transition of the local economy and not just respond to it once it was too late. He told the local paper:

... if they want a scrapper ... who knows how to really fight for what's important on the ground, then they would vote for me.

John was a man of conviction who was there to listen, help and provide advice. Sometimes that advice was sought; sometimes it was just given. Either way, John was one of the most passionate advocates many people had the pleasure to meet. I extend my sympathies to John's wife, Alison, their children, Tony, Pam, Steven and Christine, their families and John's many friends.

John saw his diagnosis with motor neurone disease in 2013 and a brain tumour last year as just another battle. Of it, he would say, 'I'm going to go out swinging'.
Vale, John Parker.

Bendigo Aquatic Centre

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My members statement is regarding the no. 1 project in Bendigo for the last five years, the Bendigo Aquatic Centre. During the week federal government announced it is going to contribute more than \$4 million to the Bendigo Aquatic Centre at Kangaroo Flat. This now puts pressure on the state Labor government to come up with the money that it previously took off the table.

In the final budget of the former state government, handed down in 2014, \$15 million was made available. Two days before the election the Victorian Labor Party, then in opposition, released its economic outlook. It took that money out and redirected it into general revenue. Now the people of Bendigo are going to be calling on the Victorian government to put that money back on the table so that this project can go ahead.

The coalition put up \$15 million. The local council is going to match that. There will be another \$4 million from the federal government. All we are waiting for now to enable the no. 1 project to go ahead is for the money that was taken away by the Labor Party to be put back in so that all of Bendigo can enjoy one of the best aquatic centres in Victoria.

Gunditjmara community

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to rise today to congratulate the Warrnambool police on their narrow victory in the Law versus Lore cricket match last Sunday. For the past 11 years local police officers and young people from the Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative Ltd have taken to the field for a game of cricket. The match was initially devised as a way to break down barriers and create partnerships between police and the Koori community. This year's match was very close, with the police team winning the Twenty20 by 20 runs.

The subject of this reconciliation event takes me to a recently launched book called *Bessiebelle ... You Could Write a Book — A History of the Bessiebelle Football Club and Its Role in Community Life* by Simone Dalton. Simone writes about the tolerance and reconciliation efforts that have been alive and very much part of the history of a small, at times struggling south-western footy club, which includes members of the Gunditjmara Aboriginal community. Simone wrote:

Bessiebelle Football Club, which began in the early 1900s and survived until the very near end of it, was ... built on a partnership between black and white players.

She went on to say:

What makes this story even more remarkable is that only down the road from the wet and often windy ground, the Indigenous population with thousands of years history in the region, had faced bloody and devastating encounters with new European white settlers just over half a century earlier ...

I congratulate Simone Dalton on her book. I also congratulate the Gunditjmara community and wish them all the best in the future.

Serdar Caglayancaay

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — It is with great sadness that I rise to condole the death of a dear friend and supporter of mine, Mr Serdar Caglayancaay, who died last week from a heart attack at the tender age of 56. I take this opportunity to pass on my condolences to his family, who lost a caring husband and father. I doubt that I would be in Parliament if it not for the support of 'the big fella', as he was affectionately known in local ALP circles. In fact Serdar's family can be proud that his support assisted many current Labor Party members from the south-eastern suburbs to be elected to Parliament, including the current Premier, Daniel Andrews.

Serdar was a larger than life, colourful character who thrived on helping people, even though he had been

suffering from the crippling effects of type 1 diabetes for a number of years, which saw him using a scooter for the last seven years of his life. But having trouble walking did not stop Serdar. He could be seen on a daily basis driving his scooter from Endeavour Hills to Dandenong — a fair hike, for those who are not familiar with the area. His scooter also came in handy for doorknocking, letterboxing and handing out how-to-vote cards on election days for the Labor Party.

Serdar's commitment and loyalty to the Labor Party, to his community and to his family was remarkable. He is survived by his wife, Hulya, and his daughters Arzum, Cansu and Tugce. Goodbye, Serdar abi. Goodbye, big fella. Goodbye, adash. We will all miss you.

Autism services

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I have met some wonderful people over the course of the year. As I have travelled the state meeting autism groups, service providers, educators, parents and researchers, I have met some amazing people doing some amazing things. From Broadmeadows Primary School, which I visited last week with the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Matthew Guy, to parents in Leongatha, all I have met have impressed me enormously.

Last week I visited an autism service specialising in early intervention. There I met Brian. Brian is a three-year-old who on a 1 to 10 scale of cuteness is about a 19. I watched as he went through his paces, naming a variety of colours and shapes. At this point I must have caught his eye, and he came over to say hello. I asked him his name. As he replied 'Brian', the room erupted with cheers and applause. I was told it was the first time Brian had told anyone apart from his therapists his name.

Little Brian did not just make my day or my week. He made my year. I look forward to doing much more for Brian and those like him. Families with autism in this state are way behind the eight ball. This government does not give them the support and respect they deserve, and I look forward to a Guy government changing that. In wishing Brian and all children and families with autism a very happy Christmas, I look forward to them all having a better Christmas in years to come.

John Parker

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — I rise this morning to pay tribute to a friend, a mentor and inspiration from Gippsland, John Parker, who passed away on the weekend. John will be remembered not only for the

significant contribution that he made to his community, to the union movement as a representative of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, as a stalwart in improving occupational health and safety, as a family man and as an activist, but for the way he made people feel. His deeds and his contributions are long in number and their legacy will be felt for many generations to come. Today as we acknowledge John, and as members of the public come together in Drouin this morning to pay tribute to everything that he did, it is the way that he made people feel that will be remembered.

John gave people dignity. John was kind, fierce and loyal. John was principled. John was one of those rare people who is a signpost and not a weathervane. John taught and inspired many people around Gippsland, and he will be missed enormously. To his wife, Alison, herself a stalwart and an inspiration for John, I pay tribute to everything that she did to care for John since he was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2014. To his children, Tony, Pam, Steven and Christine, and his seven grandchildren, I say congratulations on having such a wonderful role model. Vale, John Parker, my friend.

Goulburn Valley orchardists

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I was very pleased to host the Minister for Agriculture and the shadow Minister for Agriculture, the Leader of The Nationals in the Assembly, during their visits to Shepparton last week to meet with fruitgrowers to inspect and discuss the impact of recent hail damage to local orchards. I have been in constant contact with many of our local orchardists since the first hail event and was pleased to arrange for them to meet with both the minister and the shadow minister so that they could give firsthand accounts of how their businesses are coping following the hail and explain the need for government to provide immediate assistance to growers as well as longer term assistance for projects such as the installation of hail netting to protect crops in the future. I look forward to a response from the minister on the outcome of her visit.

Numurkah Secondary College

Ms LOVELL — It is always wonderful to meet our future leaders, and last week I had that pleasure when I was invited to attend the Numurkah Secondary College 2016 school awards evening, which included the announcement of the school leaders for 2016. The leadership team for next year includes Scott Gamble, Kate Mansfield, Megan O'Flynn and Brianna Devine. I wish the leadership team and all students at Numurkah

Secondary College well for 2016, and I congratulate all students who received awards in 2015.

Wilmot Road Primary School

Ms LOVELL — Last week I had the privilege of attending the Wilmot Road Primary School scholarships presentation ceremony, at which I was proud to present the community leadership scholarship that I sponsor to nine-year-old Sfa Alghazaly. The scholarships program, which has been running for three years and supports students in grades 4 to 6, is designed as a teaching and learning tool to provide students with experiences outside of the classroom. I congratulate all recipients of this year's scholarships and look forward to spending time with Sfa during the 2016 school year.

Bestchance Training

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I was very pleased last Thursday evening to attend the Bestchance Training graduation and awards ceremony. Bestchance Training is a not-for-profit registered training organisation which deals mainly with people in the community who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and have limited support at home to study. They juggle their studies with family and work commitments. It was a great effort for so many students to obtain their certificate III qualifications in subjects such as aged care and education support.

Doveton Special Soccer School

Mr LEANE — I would like to give the member for Dandenong in the Legislative Assembly, Gabrielle Williams, a big rap for organising last weekend's soccer match against Doveton Special Soccer School graduates. They were great players — better than us. If I could blow my own trumpet, I had a great 10 minutes as goalkeeper. After that we lost the game 10 to 1, but we are looking forward to a comeback next year, and I reckon we have a chance to improve on that.

Felicitations

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — There will not be another matter from me today, there will be only one. As this is our last parliamentary sitting week for the year, I would like to take this opportunity to add my voice to that of other colleagues and thank the clerks and all the staff at Parliament House for their invaluable assistance during the year. If I tried to name all the designated staff who have been cheerful and helpful to me and my colleagues, particularly during our late sittings, I would surely miss someone and that is not my intention. I thank them all.

In particular, I would like to thank you, President, and wish you and everyone in this house as well as the people in my electorate a safe and happy Christmas season with their families and friends. I look forward to seeing you all in 2016.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That in accordance with standing order 11.01, there be tabled in the Council by Wednesday, 20 January 2016, a copy of all documents relating to traffic flows, projections and plans produced, developed, considered or researched by VicRoads, state government departments and other state government authorities concerning Punt Road (also referred to as Hoddle Street) between St Kilda Road and Swan Street, including but not limited to —

- (1) the Punt Road public acquisition overlay documentation, and any assessments thereof, including legal advice;
- (2) advice or assessments concerning road alternatives and alignments and road options to better connect the ends of Punt Road between St Kilda Road and Swan Street, including tunnel options, 'cut and fill' options along the current Punt Road alignments or other alignments and options to widen Swan Street Bridge;
- (3) all documents, correspondence and briefings received by the Punt Road Public Acquisition Overlay Advisory Committee, including material provided for or from public consultations;
- (4) all documents examining the impact of widening or other changes on the amenity of Punt Road and neighbouring residents;
- (5) all documents examining the impact of widening or other road and traffic changes on the health of Punt Road residents and neighbouring residents;
- (6) all documents examining the impact of widening or other road and traffic changes on the local schools and students attending those schools, including Christ Church Grammar, Wesley College (all local campuses and facilities), Christ Church Grammar Preschool, South Yarra Primary School, Melbourne Girls Junior Grammar (Morris Hall), Melbourne Girls Grammar School (Merton Hall), including any examination of the impact of potential changes, especially examinations of changed risks to safety brought about by increased traffic movements, including students crossing Punt Road;
- (7) all documents examining the impact of widening or other road and traffic changes on the aged and other care facilities, including Centennial House Nursing Home, Royal Freemasons Homes of Victoria, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the Alfred hospital and Montefiore Homes for the Aged;
- (8) all documents examining the impact of widening or other road and traffic changes on the access and amenity of residents in neighbouring streets, including the impact on local community of the above potential road changes;

- (9) documents, assessments or examinations of the impact of different road options considered on the preservation of public green spaces, including the Royal Botanic Gardens, the Yarra River and associated precinct and Fawkner Park;
- (10) the use of the Morell Bridge, including changes of access and new bridge options or alternatives, including connections between Punt Road, the Morell Bridge and Anderson Street;
- (11) options and models for funding road widening and traffic changes alternatives (including all tunnel or cut and fill alternatives), including levies and tolls; and
- (12) all consultancy or internal reports undertaken, completed or otherwise, relating to the above.

This is in one sense a straightforward documents motion that seeks, under standing order 11.01, the tabling in the Council by 20 January 2016 of a copy of all documents relating to traffic flows, projections, plans produced, developed and considered by VicRoads, state government departments and other state government authorities concerning Punt Road between St Kilda Road and Swan Street. It lays out a series of analyses that may or may not have been undertaken. I am aware that some of these have been undertaken, and I am also aware that it is unlikely that some have been undertaken to the scale and complexity and in the cautious way that you would expect a government agency to undertake a number of these points.

This documents motion seeks very simply the presentation of those documents to the chamber. It seeks to inform public debate. The government is undertaking a public consultation process at the moment, and that public consultation process requires that the community have submissions available for the consultation process by early February. These documents would inform the community of matters around the government's proposals on Punt Road. It is important that the chamber understand some of the context of these matters and why the provision of these documents, in my view, is in the public and community interest.

The overlay on Punt Road has been there for many decades. That overlay seeks to leave the government's options open for the widening of Punt Road. Clearly Punt Road carries an enormous amount of traffic, and that traffic is growing, although perhaps not growing at the rate that some have alluded to. Nonetheless, the full analysis of these studies that has been undertaken by government over a period of time would inform public debate on these matters.

It is clear that Punt Road is not only a major thoroughfare road but also a road that is part of the community in South Yarra. It is clear that major institutions in South Yarra are located in and around Punt Road. I have named many of them in the motion to make it abundantly clear to the executive that documents relating to any analysis of the impact of road widening should be provided to the chamber and thereby to the community to enable better decision-making to occur. Whether it is the South Yarra Primary School, major health institutions, aged-care institutions or public or private schools, we should have those analyses in the public domain. Where the government has not undertaken a rigorous analysis of those areas — and for some there may be no documents available — that fact should be in the public domain too. If the government is making decisions on these matters, it should do so in a way that ensures that these documents are in the public domain and that decision-making is improved.

I am very concerned about the government's proposal to widen Punt Road. The coalition's position has been that a clearway is one way to manage this issue, perhaps with additional car parking provided in and around Punt Road. There are several options for that, but that has been the coalition's position. We accept the government is going through a process and it needs to get on with that, but the community needs to be able to have its input into the process in an informed way and in a way that the executive does not have additional information at its disposal that the community, the Council and indeed members of Parliament do not have at their disposal.

The Legislative Council has the powers to demand these documents. If the motion is carried today, I implore the government to move as quickly as it can so that the public consultation is not in any way hindered or delayed by the process. Many members of the community have spoken to me as their local upper house member. They have made the point that the exercising of the government's public acquisition overlay and a widening of Punt Road is not the best option. As I said, our position has been in favour of a clearway, perhaps with associated parking.

I am also aware that the government has done other analyses of options. I know that the Morrell Bridge has been the subject of some of those discussions. I know the widening of the crossing of the Yarra River has also been the subject of those discussions. I know that options for cut and fill and potential tunnel solutions have been considered at various points in the past. The details of those examinations need to be in the public

domain to inform the decision that the government and the community make on all of the options.

In bringing the motion forward, I make the point very strongly that South Yarra is a community and that putting a massive freeway through the middle of that community would have enormous effects. There would be safety effects, health effects and effects on community connectivity. None of these appear to have been thought through sufficiently by the government.

This production of documents motion will put more information into the public domain. It will inform the public consultation process, and it will inform members of Parliament, the local council and the community in full. In those circumstances I believe it is very much in the public interest that all of the documents be provided and that the government does not seek to use some mechanism of executive privilege or some other public interest focus as a way of avoiding the provision of documents. I can assure the community that I will be working very hard to ensure that these documents are provided.

The date of 20 January has been carefully chosen to enable the government to move in a reasonable time but also to provide those documents in a period that will enable the community to have full access to them prior to any further submissions that people might make to the public consultation process. It is an important date. It is not an ill-thought-through date; it is one that is absolutely imperative. In those circumstances I urge the chamber to support the motion. It is very much in the public interest.

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank Mr Davis for bringing this motion forward. Consistent with the Greens position on documents request motions, we will be supporting this motion in the interests of open and transparent government. It is important that the community have access to the full range of information, because ultimately it is their amenity that is going to be affected by any changes to this really significant thoroughfare in Melbourne. In his contribution Mr Davis was right in saying that the Punt Road public acquisition overlay has been in place for a very long time. It is a hangover from transport planning which envisaged Melbourne as a network of roads, while public transport was diminishing.

Now, however, we need to change that mindset quite dramatically. The reality is we cannot continue to choke our streets with more and more cars. The fact is that any widening of our roads, particularly significant roads such as Punt Road, will only increase congestion, and that has very poor outcomes for the car drivers and

even worse outcomes for communities whose members live in those areas and have to deal with increased traffic in their area.

We are of the view that the acquisition overlay should not even exist; it should be removed to give some certainty to the people in that area. Why would we want to see a six-lane road dividing the Prahran community? That would be a very poor outcome for that local community. We recognise that overlays are a useful tool in terms of community planning; however, given the historic nature of this particular overlay, it is really a hangover from the past, and this is definitely not about certainty, so its removal would in fact create certainty for those communities.

We note that the VicRoads background reports show that the traffic volumes on Punt Road have decreased over the past decade, while patronage on the Punt Road bus, 246, continues to grow. The Greens would hope to see an increase in public transport, and there are a number of things that could happen on Punt Road that would increase the opportunity for people to utilise public transport along that thoroughfare. Clearway extensions, a high-frequency inner-city SmartBus and traffic light priorities as well as city-wide public transport improvements would provide options for commuters, meaning they would not have to get into their cars. I think the reality and the core of this is that we need to provide opportunities for people to leave their cars at home and not even think about using their cars in the first place. To contemplate widening Punt Road at a cost of \$500 million — you could spend \$500 million on a lot of public transport.

In terms of the hub of the documents request, I note that this is a house of review. This house and members in it have a right to request documents from the government in relation to discovering the full range of information that has been sought in this particular motion in relation to that Punt Road public acquisition overlay. It is in the public interest for the community to see these documents. After all, they are the ones who have to deal with any decisions in relation to this, and their amenity is really important. The Greens believe the date proposed by Mr Davis is a reasonable one and allows the community to continue to have input on what is a very important process with a full range of information at hand. We have a right to see those documents. It is the function of this house, and the Greens will be supporting this motion.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — As it does with all requests for the production of documents in this chamber, the government is happy to support this motion. But, as we always say — and as we respected

when we were in opposition — we will have to look at the documents to make sure there are no cabinet-in-confidence or commercial-in-confidence documents that may affect good government. I think our record in delivering documents to the Parliament has been good in the year that we have been in government. That is in stark contrast with the record of the government in which Mr Davis was a senior minister in the last Parliament, when there was refusal to produce documents pursuant to motions similar to the motion by which Mr Davis is requesting documents today.

It is very important to ensure that cabinet-in-confidence documents remain secure. Departmental people and experts give advice to cabinet without fear or favour so that government can function. If that ceases to be the case and they cannot give advice without fear or favour, it will affect the way the government can function; it will affect good government. If someone gives advice on something and the story is plastered all over the *Herald Sun*, for example, about it — even if the advice has not been taken up — that person's reputation will be besmirched because they had the foresight and the courage to suggest something that may or may not have been acceptable to the government or the community.

We need to have this process and that has to be respected. In the last Parliament when Labor was in opposition and its members spoke on motions requesting documents, they put on the record that they understood that some documents may be cabinet in confidence and commercial in confidence. We were consistent throughout our period in opposition and we remain consistent with that position now that we are in government. The inconsistency comes from those on the other side of the chamber, but I suppose that is to be expected.

I will say that the establishment of an independent advisory group with terms of reference to review the Punt Road public acquisition overlay was an election commitment. The group has been established. We are in the business of fulfilling our election commitments. That is as far as I would like to go on this motion. The government will not be opposing the motion calling for these documents, and the documents will be handed over, except for, as I said, any commercial-in-confidence or cabinet-in-confidence papers.

Motion agreed to.

LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Reference

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I move:

That, pursuant to section 33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, this house requires the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 30 November 2016, on the impacts of lowering the probationary driving age in Victoria to 17, including —

- (1) reviewing the licence structures in other Australian states, particularly the probationary driving age;
- (2) assessing the links between the existing 18-year-old probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas;
- (3) reviewing the impacts of separating the legal driving age and legal drinking age;
- (4) considering relevant international licensing models and the positive and negative impacts of such; and
- (5) assessing the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll.

It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak in the debate on my motion calling for an inquiry to lower the probationary driving age in Victoria. As an elected member for Western Victoria Region for a grassroots party called Vote 1 Local Jobs, I am deeply concerned about the future of our young people. South-western Victoria has the lowest year 12 attainment rates of all of Victoria's regions and one of Australia's highest youth unemployment rates. New statistics have revealed drug-related crime in south-western Victoria has more than doubled over the past five years. Police data has revealed that the number of drug crimes throughout the Warrnambool, Moyne, Corangamite, Glenelg and Southern Grampians shires has at least doubled, if not tripled. We believe that employment is fundamental for a healthy and successful community. Give people a job, and they are less likely to become involved in crime and drug abuse. Employment creates a community where aspirations for the future become clearer.

In our patch of the woods we face a huge barrier to young people gaining meaningful employment. One of our biggest barriers is our public transport infrastructure, or more correctly the lack of it. Where I live rural towns and farming communities may have one or two return bus services to a regional centre — if they are lucky. Many outlying towns do not even have the privilege of a bus service. In addition to this, many members of our community in agriculture and trades-based jobs do not work 9 to 5. Their morning

starts could be at 6.00 a.m. or earlier, but there is no metropolitan train coming every 10 minutes; there is only mum or dad to drive them to work, which could take an hour or more.

My office has been inundated by constituents raising this issue — for instance, the truck driver dad whose son has been offered an electrical apprenticeship, but for him to get to work in Warrnambool by 7.00 a.m., mum has to leave his preteen brother and sister in bed on their own until she has made the 1.5 hour round trip at 6.00 a.m. A mum of five has a daughter who has disliked school for many years. She sourced an agricultural apprenticeship at a large dairy farm, but the 6.00 a.m. starts have made it impossible for her to take the job. Her mum is a nurse, and it is not physically possible to get to her work and return by 7.00 a.m. These are just two of the many stories we have been told about.

The issue of a lack of public transport in regional communities is not a new one. The state government's recent regional network development plan community consultation process revealed there was a need for greater frequency of train services to and from towns like Warrnambool, as well as the need for more bus services earlier and later in the day and on weekends. Over a decade ago, in 2003, a specific national forum on young people in rural and regional Australia was held by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in Terrigal, New South Wales. The forum was primarily focused on identifying transport solutions, although it included a report on local transport needs. This research identified part-time employment, apprenticeships and traineeships, TAFE study and employment-related activities such as work placement and employment training as several of the travel access needs most frequently mentioned by year 10 students.

Community consultation was undertaken as part of this project, with the aim of providing input from young people and their carers regarding existing transport issues and problems which they experienced in rural and regional Australia. Submissions highlighted parts of regional towns or villages which the bus service did not reach and the lack of links between towns and villages. A lack of night and weekend services were points made on a number of occasions. The low frequency and occasional nature of some bus services was seen as a major barrier. One youth worker highlighted that transport difficulties could result in breaches of Centrelink rules for the work for the dole scheme. The most common comment raised by almost all submissions in one form or another was the lack of access to transport restricting educational, employment and social opportunities. Unfortunately little has

changed in south-western and western Victoria in the past 10 years.

When considered within a national context Victoria is dragging the chain when it comes to driving licences. Victoria is the only state where you need to be 18 to gain a probationary licence. The minimum age for an independent drivers licence is 17 in most other states, except the Northern Territory, where it is possible to gain a licence at the age of 16 and 6 months. The minimum age for a learner's permit is 16 years, except in the ACT where it is 15 years and 9 months. Vote 1 Local Jobs believes Victorian 17-year-olds are just as responsible as their interstate counterparts and that if you live on one side of the Murray or one side of the South Australian border, 17 is a reasonable age to obtain a probationary licence.

In February this year high school student Khalid Issa launched a petition to allow Victorians to obtain their P-plates at 17. That petition attracted almost 25 000 signatures. At the time Khalid was two months shy of his 17th birthday, living in Werribee and looking for a trade rather than completing his Victorian certificate of education, but as he said, the prospective employers he approached told him he would need a drivers licence in order to get a job.

This motion is in no way designed to reduce road safety in Victoria; we all want to get home safely to our families. Australians deserve to have a safe legislative framework, safe workplaces and safe roads. There are several studies, including two from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in America, which reveal that driving experience rather than driving age matters more when it comes to the safety of young adult drivers.

That is why my motion is not to automatically lower the driving age, but for the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to inquire into the impacts of lowering the probationary driving age in Victoria to 17, and that would include reviewing the licence structures in other Australian states, particularly the probationary driving age; assessing the links between the existing 18-year-old probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas; reviewing the impacts of separating the legal driving age and legal drinking age; considering relevant international licensing models and the positive and negative impacts of such; and assessing the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll. I believe this motion deserves the support of this chamber, and I commend it to the house.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The government is happy to support Mr Purcell's reference to the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee concerning research around the driving age. However, I flag that the government would like to propose an amendment to the motion with a view to broadening the inquiry to include transport infrastructure in regional areas and the barriers that might present to people in regional areas and, as Mr Purcell touched on, the challenges that they have in this area. We are concerned about lowering the driving age, and I am sure the reasons for this can be fleshed out in the committee as to whether or not it is correct for us to have these concerns.

The government believes the learner driver program has been quite a successful program. Learner drivers are required to partake in 120 hours of supervised driving, including a minimum of 10 hours at night. I know from speaking to many supervisors, usually parents, and learners that it is a challenge to get that time behind the wheel, but we believe it is the right way to go about it. Currently a learners permit can be acquired at 16 years of age. It gives a person two years to make sure that they get the minimum of 120 hours supervised training and experience behind the wheel before they get their P plates. We know that even with the 120 hours supervised driving the cohort of young people who get their P plates is the most at risk of being involved in collisions on our roads that sometimes, sadly, cause very dramatic outcomes.

I was interested to hear Mr Purcell talk about opportunities for apprentices, his discussions with the family of an electrical apprentice and the challenges that the driving age provides. I think it was in 2007 that I enlisted one of the parliamentary interns to do a report for me. My mindset at the time was very similar to Mr Purcell's in that coming from a trade background I was concerned that younger men and women were not getting the opportunity to pick up apprenticeships because of their not being able to drive to the sites. I was also cynical at the time about whether the companies wanted apprentices to carry equipment such as ladders and so forth in their own vehicles as they travelled to work.

The parliamentary library arranged for a young man to do a report on the availability of apprenticeships and whether the driving age affected that. The young person who did the report is now a lawyer working in Gippsland. It was a long time ago, although it does not seem that long; it was in 2007. His report concluded that the driving age did not make a difference to young people being able to get an apprenticeship. It surprised and disappointed me, because my theory had always been that it did affect it, and someone said to me, 'Well,

that'll teach you to ask someone to do a report when you're not sure what the outcome is going to be'. In saying that, he did a great job. The report is in the parliamentary library. As I said, the government has no concern with fleshing out these issues. They are important issues, and I congratulate Mr Purcell for bringing the motion to the house.

As I flagged, the government would like to broaden the scope of Mr Purcell's proposed reference so the committee can look at a broader aspect. Accordingly, I move:

That all the words after '30 November 2016,' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place —

'on —

- (1) the impacts of lowering the probationary driving age in Victoria to 17, including —
 - (a) reviewing the licence structures in other Australian states, particularly the probationary driving age;
 - (b) assessing the links between the existing 18-year-old probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas;
 - (c) reviewing the impacts of separating the legal driving age and legal drinking age;
 - (d) considering relevant international licensing models and the positive and negative impacts of such; and
 - (e) assessing the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll;
- (2) the adequacy of current transport infrastructure and services available to people of non-driving age, particularly in regional Victoria;
- (3) strategies to remove barriers for people of non-driving age to access employment, study and training.'

As I said, we would like to suggest, if Mr Purcell is happy, that we broaden the reference to have a look at those barriers that Mr Purcell identified in his speech when moving his motion. We think it would be a good process, and we acknowledge that there can be barriers around young people's employment and study with regard to accessibility, especially in regional areas, so if that would be accepted, we would be very happy.

In saying that, we do support the premise of Mr Purcell's motion. The government will be voting for this motion, and we look forward to the work that the committee does and the outcome of that. Maybe it will have a different outcome to the work my parliamentary intern did, because he did not have the resources that I imagine the committee will have.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I am happy to speak to the motion moved by Mr Purcell and also the amendment moved by the government. I am pleased that Mr Purcell has put this issue up so the government can maybe do some work and research this issue. There is a lot of merit to working on this issue. I think there are a range of issues here that many of us think about often, and there are a range of views around some of these issues, so it will be good to be able to flesh out what the facts tell us, and there are a range of facts in relation to these issues.

One of the areas where there are probably not going to be many facts at present is this link that Mr Purcell has come up with between the inability to drive and the inability to get a job for a young person. From a government that has limited credibility when it comes to young people in the regions, we have a situation where it is a constant struggle for regional parents to get their children into major regional centres for them to be able to work. Certainly it is of benefit for young adults who leave school in other states to be able to drive themselves to their places of employment, so whether there is a direct link between the ability to get work and an inability to drive a car is something that will be important to scrutinise.

Going on from that, it will also be interesting to see the potential of having a modified licence or a work-only licence. I am not 100 per cent sure, but I think there are some of those licences available for Victorian people who live around the Murray River and who work in New South Wales. I think it is used more for people from New South Wales who need those types of modified licences. Again, what will the experts tell us about that concept? The reason the coalition is happy to support this reference is that it is based around learning more and getting more of the facts so that we can then make a better informed decision.

I like the concept of looking at the link between separating the legal drinking age from the legal driving age. It is something that scares many of us parents. It is not just drinking and driving that happen to both become legal on one particular day when you turn 18; they tend to also coincide with students doing year 12, where there is a birthday party nearly every weekend. All of a sudden these young people have part-time jobs, so they have cash in their pockets, they have the ability to drive a car and there are parties on every weekend.

This time also coincides with many young people having already left school and having moved away from home. What we have in Victoria is this amazing, very short period in our lives when we finish school, we turn 18, we get a job, we have money in our pockets,

we can drink and we can drive. If we are trying to create a cocktail for disaster, we have probably done it. We have done it unconsciously, and maybe it is worth looking at separating some of those life-changing processes that we all go through at that one time.

One of the other aspects of this is that we have been told by expert research that the age we begin driving is nowhere near as important as driver experience. Again it would be worth looking at the statistics to work through that. However, on the opposite side to that we have Dr Bridie Scott-Parker from New South Wales, who is a road researcher. She has put out statistics that say young people of 17 years of age are incapable of handling the freedoms that come with a licence, and she is calling for the New South Wales age to be raised to 18. Let us look at this in its totality; let us look at the facts and figures within the referral.

There is one stark fact that we need to be cognisant of when we talk about this reference and this particular subject. In every other state in Australia, they bury about ten 17-year-olds every year who die in single-car accidents as lone first-year drivers. Those 10 kids in Victoria are still alive, and the statistics for every other age bracket are similar. It is very stark. If you want to put your name to changing the age limit from 18 to 17, you have to have the courage to talk to those 10 families next year who are going to lose their 17-year-olds in single-car accidents. They are going to have their lives changed forever. There is a genuine and a real cost associated with making this decision.

Let us bring on the referral. Let us look at the information that comes in, and we will see where it leads. It is worthwhile doing this work, because it is an important issue on all fronts.

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank Mr Purcell for his motion. It certainly raises a lot of really important issues in terms of what it is trying to achieve. I will also talk to the amendment moved by Mr Leane.

We know Victoria is the only state where young people are eligible for a probationary driving licence at the age of 18. This could be a significant disadvantage for them, given what we know of other states and territories where young people can get their licence at 17 years of age. I believe in the Northern Territory it is even younger. In terms of what is happening at a nationwide level, Victoria has had this age limit for some years now and has been separate from the rest of Australia for near on 40 years. When we look across the different states, we see that New South Wales has a provisional licence, which is like our probationary

licence, from 17 years of age. Queensland also has a provisional licence from 17 years of age, South Australia from 17 years of age, Tasmania from 17 years of age and Western Australia from 17 years of age. It is certainly worth exploring the licence structures in other Australian states and particularly the probationary driving age.

In terms of assessing the links between the 18-year-old probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas, we know that youth unemployment is at crisis levels across many parts of Victoria. One out of every six young Victorians is currently unemployed; that is 90 000 young people who are out of work, missing out on learning skills, developing their careers, earning an income and contributing to their communities. It is the highest level of youth unemployment since the recession in the 1990s, and we know such high levels of unemployment have broad consequences for people, families and communities. Those consequences can be far ranging and include social isolation, poverty and physical and mental health impacts, to name just a few.

We also know that in some parts of Victoria youth unemployment is even higher, at one in five, and when we look at that data we see that in the north-east of Melbourne, the Mornington Peninsula and western Victoria 20 per cent of young people are unemployed, and in Geelong and west Melbourne it is 21 per cent. In some of these places there are already high levels of social disadvantage. The reality is that if we cannot help young people find meaningful work, we are at risk of losing that generation of young people to limited life prospects and generational poverty. It would be a travesty if we allowed that to happen.

Mr Purcell's motion looks at reviewing the impacts of separating the legal driving age and the legal drinking age. It is a confluence of many things when you turn 18 in the state of Victoria, although on the face of things, in terms of the data, raising the drinking age appears to save lives when you look at what is happening in other countries. Certainly in the US there is strong evidence that the higher drinking age saves lives and results in lower alcohol-related harms generally.

The motion goes on to talk about considering relevant international licensing models and the positives and negatives, and when we look at what is happening in the world we see that in New Zealand the age is 16½ for a restricted licence, whereas the legal alcohol purchase age is 18. In the US, depending on what state you are in, the provisional licence age is either 16 or 17 years old, whereas the legal age for alcohol purchase is 21. In the European Union the age is generally 18,

except for Austria and the UK, where it is 17, and in Japan it is 18. It would be interesting to contemplate what is happening in other countries around the world.

In terms of assessing the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll, going back to past data, a discussion paper released by VicRoads in 2005 states that if the driving age was lowered to 17, the road toll would rise by 20 in the first year, with 250 people more seriously injured and 13 each year after, with 200 more serious injuries. That data is now 10 years old. It is important to consider the current learnings and evidence available in relation to the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll, but the road toll data at the moment shows a lower road toll among young adults in Victoria than in other states. It is worth re-examining this data to see what is going on, because there are a lot of contributing factors. The terms of an inquiry into these matters could allow a fulsome examination of all the issues that come into play in relation to the probationary driving age, the influence of alcohol, unemployment and other issues bundled together.

The Greens are happy to support the amendment that Mr Leane is proposing. It is important to look at the adequacy of current transport infrastructure and services, and at the heart of that is allowing people — not just young people, although young people generally bear the brunt of this — to get around the state by public transport. Most recently, I think in the last week, the residents of Port Campbell took a hit because Public Transport Victoria has now reversed a commitment to a bus extension between Camperdown and Timboon to include Port Campbell. That was a blow for that community and the people who want to utilise that service, including young people, some of whom want to access their learning institution or place of employment.

If the first part of the amendment looks at how to provide adequate public transport and other services to not only young people but people across the state, that would be a welcome piece of work, as would the second part of the amendment, which is about looking at strategies to remove barriers for people of non-driving age to access employment, study and training. I think it is incumbent upon all governments to look at how they can remove barriers.

This amendment certainly broadens the inquiry enormously. Ultimately, as I understand it, the flavour of Mr Purcell's motion is about making sure that young people have every opportunity to access work and education. The amendment enhances the terms that are listed here in relation to the inquiry, which needs to be

broad ranging. There are important social issues at play around unemployment levels and the road toll that could have very serious consequences for young people, so we need to look at this very carefully.

The Greens believe this is well worth an inquiry to pursue the facts so that we can start to make informed decisions about the best way for young people to get every opportunity they can to access work and education. With that, the Greens will be supporting Mr Purcell's motion and the amendment proposed by Mr Leane.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I thank Mr Purcell for bringing this motion to the house to lower the driving age. I think it is a great motion and I will be supporting it. I was particularly struck by the stories Mr Purcell told in support of his motion about the impact in regional areas, where public transport is not widespread. Bringing that human face into the house was really valuable in showing why this inquiry is so important.

I will briefly bring in my perspective on this matter. As the mother of a son who has just turned 18 and can only just now get his licence, I recognise the issues raised by Mr Purcell. While we do not live in a rural area, this matter has certainly had an impact on Terry's ability to get or not get jobs. I am also very concerned about the correlation between young people getting a licence to drive at the same time as they are legally able to drink. It makes a lot of sense to me and to other parents for young people to have a drivers licence for 12 months before being legally able to drink.

I turn now to the motion that Mr Purcell has brought forward today, which requires the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to inquire into, consider and report no later than 30 November 2016 on the impacts of lowering the probationary driving age in Victoria to 17. Like Mr Purcell, I also note that the laws across Australia are quite inconsistent. Most states allow for a licence to be obtained from the age of 17. In the Northern Territory it is 16½ years. In Victoria it is 18 years.

There are many arguments for and against lowering the driving age, which I acknowledge. Some arguments for, which have already been canvassed today, include the minimum driving age in Victoria being disproportionate to other Australian states and territories, limited transport options in regional areas, which restricts people's ability to get to school or work, many workplaces requiring their employees have personal transport, and public transport not always being reliable or accessible.

I note that recently some work was done in this area by Melbourne student Khalid Issa, who created a petition addressed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety which called on the Victorian government to lower the legal driving age by one year. In an article in the *Sunraysia Daily* of 17 February Khalid is reported as saying:

I have employers contact me telling me that they cannot hire me because I don't have a driver licence.

I believe this petition has attracted around 20 000 signatures to date, which is quite significant. Khalid comes from Werribee, which is in my area and is where my electorate office is. I am well aware of the limited public transport in this area. I know that in Point Cook all services cease at 6.30 p.m., which makes it extremely difficult for anybody to access their place of employment or education after hours if they do not have a licence or a car. I commend Khalid for his work in this area. Another article on Khalid, published in the *Age* of 14 February, states:

Two months shy of his 17th birthday appears, Khalid is a young man in a hurry. A year 11 student ... he would rather be learning a trade, perhaps as a carpenter, than in school.

But the few prospective employers he has approached have all told him he would need a drivers licence to be considered ...

It goes on to quote Khalid as saying:

I'm definitely not alone in this ... I have so many friends that just want to start a career a little bit early but they're kind of put on hold just because Victoria is the only state that has this rule.

Mr Purcell's motion seeks to answer some of these questions for people who feel as though their life is a little bit on hold at the moment.

There are also a number of arguments against lowering the probationary driving age. The role of committee members will be to assess these and weigh them up.

Lowering the driving age is a step in the opposite direction from what was discussed in the report compiled for VicRoads in 2012 entitled *Victoria's Graduated Licensing System Evaluation Interim Report*. I also note that the RACV has opposed lowering the driving age in Victoria, concerned that it would increase road trauma, increase the number of 'immature people' — their words, not mine — getting a licence and of course increase the number of road users.

Melinda Spiteri, manager of road user behaviour at the RACV, has completely opposed the idea of dropping the driving age. She has stated:

We know if we lower the licence age we're just going to increase road crashes among that age group and we're going to increase the number of deaths on our road.

She continued:

So no, we definitely should not be thinking about lowering the licence age because it's just too risky.

It would be good if the committee were able to look into these comments and seek to assess whether they have merit. As someone who had a licence at 17, I find them very interesting. This motion is a good way of opening up this conversation and settling this matter.

With the arguments both for and against, I believe this committee reference is appropriate. Mr Purcell's motion is for an inquiry into feasibility. It is likely to uncover more information and evidence that the Victorian Parliament can use to make an informed decision on this matter. I also note that lowering the driving age during working hours is part of Mr Purcell's eight-point jobs plan. I congratulate him for pursuing this matter in this place.

I turn now to the amendment the government has brought forward, which I have only just seen. I accept that it is in the spirit of Mr Purcell's motion, which is to consider how people who do not drive can access transport. This is not just relevant for people of non-driving age. It is also extremely relevant, for example, for people with disabilities, a number of whom are unable to get a licence. It would be good for the committee to look at strategies to remove barriers to accessing employment, study and training for people who are of non-driving age or unable to drive.

I will be supporting this motion. I believe it has a number of potential benefits, both economic and social. I will be supporting the amendment put forward by the government. I await the report of the committee next year with great interest.

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on Mr Purcell's motion. I commend him for bringing it to the house. The issue of at what age people should be able to get their drivers licence is one we can never have enough debate about or research on. It is debated around the world, and the standard differs somewhat between states in Australia and between countries. In some places the driving age is 15, in some it is 16, in some it is 17 and in some it is 18. This issue is of interest to me because my own kids are getting to this age. My 16-year-old son just got his learners permit. As a parent you keep your fingers crossed, you try to do your best and you hope that when your kids are put in charge of a vehicle, one, they are safe and

drive responsibly, and two, they do not put other people at risk. It worries me a lot to think about that.

There has been a lot of work done over the years by various governments, VicRoads and the Transport Accident Commission to try to educate our young Victorians to be responsible. There is now a requirement for learners to have 120 hours of supervised driving practice before they can get their licence. It may not seem like much, but it is. My son has had his learners permit for six months, and I do not think he has reached 10 hours yet. I know a lot of parents whose kids have rushed to get their hours up in the last few months before turning 18.

I accept some of the arguments put by Mr Purcell and some of the reasoning behind this motion. In regional areas there is a lack of public transport and kids do not have the same luxury as people living in metropolitan Melbourne. That is a real issue that needs to be addressed. That is why the government's amendment to broaden the scope of the committee's inquiry to include the adequacy of current transport infrastructure and the services available to people of non-driving age, particularly in regional Victoria, is very important.

Mr Purcell raised the issue of the need to offer better access to employment, study and training in regional areas. In most cases someone doing a traineeship in country Victoria will need to be able to get from point A to point B. People may say their parents can drive them around. That is a possibility; however, while in metro areas most journeys last somewhere between 10 and 30 minutes, in country Victoria they could be much longer. I can see the reasoning behind Mr Purcell's argument.

Victoria is probably one of the better states at working hard to ensure that we reduce road traumas. We invest a fair bit in ensuring particularly that young people do their 120 hours of driving practice to get all the experience they need to get their full licence and in trying to keep accidents and traumas to as low a rate as possible. We have a reasonable record in comparison to other jurisdictions, and the last thing we want to do is change any of the current laws to compromise that.

This is an opportunity for the committee to explore these issues, which are all encompassed in Mr Purcell's motion, together with the amendment moved by the government. One of the good things about a reference like this is that it is non-partisan. Everyone will be driven to make sure that we do not compromise the current safety regime we have in place and to look at how we can enhance our standards and make sure the road statistics are improved so that we have less

accidents and traumas on the road, while at the same time addressing some of the issues in Mr Purcell's motion about how we can assist young kids to get their licences early so they can enhance their training and employment opportunities. The committee will look at other models around the country and around the world to make sure that whatever is done does not compromise those things I have talked about.

Since the Andrews Labor government came to office a lot of work has been done in relation to road safety. Since the introduction of the graduated licensing system in Victoria in 2007 there has been a significant reduction in the rates of death and serious injury among young people on our roads. That is the point I made earlier; this is something we do not want to compromise. People could argue that lowering the driving age to 17 in Victoria would likely result in an increase in the number of road accidents and deaths. We need to make sure that any changes we make do not lead to that.

We still have a duty to protect young lives, and education is very important. At the age of 16, 17 or 18 you feel invincible. You can do anything. You basically just go out there and think that nothing can stop you, and that is a real concern. That is why the introduction of the graduated licensing scheme, in which a young driver graduates from a learners permit to a P1 and then a P2 licence, has led to a further improvement in our standards. Young drivers aged between 18 and 25 are over-represented in the road toll, and that age group accounts for about a quarter of all driver deaths, despite being only 12 per cent of licence-holders. It is still a real issue that needs to be addressed. I do not stand here with the answers, but hopefully the committee can look at some examples of how we can improve the current situation and make sure that the road toll for drivers aged 17 to 25, basically that 12 per cent, can be reduced further. We do not want that to increase.

There has been a lot of investment by the Andrews Labor government in, for example, the young driver safety package, with \$146 million committed to reduce road trauma amongst young people and cement Victoria as the leader in youth road safety. The package is made up of five initiatives: a road safety education complex; a practical safe driving program; L2P, a learner driver mentor program; a free licence scheme; and community grants, a communication fund and student forums. These are initiatives the government has introduced to improve the current system, and that is something it will continue working on.

I will go back to my earlier concern. Whilst I support the motion with the amendment and believe the

committee will do a good job of making sure the inquiry is not rushed and is not basically driven in one direction, and I do not believe that is the intention of Mr Purcell's motion — far from it — the main aim is to determine how we can address the concerns of young people in regional Victoria and make it easier for them to travel to access training, find employment et cetera without compromising the current safety standards, because that is very important. We do not want to be doing anything to increase the risk of a young person getting behind the wheel and ending up in a tragic situation. That is the last thing we want to do.

I am pleased to hear that we are not looking at changing the drinking age limit. That would definitely make the situation more problematic, and I will definitely not be advocating for that. It is important to make sure that these two things are separate.

Having heard all these comments and the amendment moved by Mr Leane, I think it would be good for the committee to do its work. I wish the committee well; I am sure it will do a good job, and I look forward to its report — I think we were talking about November next year. With those words, I commend the motion to the house.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the house for the opportunity to speak to Mr Purcell's motion relating to the probationary driving age in Victoria and a reference to the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee. I start by saying, 'Good for you, Mr Purcell, for asking the question', because I think it is a question that needs to be asked.

I do not have the answer to this, but something that has been running around in my head for a few years is: how do we keep kids safe on our roads? Let me start by saying that every single night when my children, who are all of driving age, are out on the roads I worry about them. I think most parents, whilst they may go to bed before their children arrive home, are almost asleep with one eye open waiting for the sound of that door clicking shut, whatever time of the night or early hour of the morning it is, ensuring that their kids got home safely.

I do not know the answer to the question about what the right driving age is, and I say thank you to Mr Purcell for raising it. It is a question that needs to be asked, and I look forward to the activities of the committee in reviewing licence structures across Australia and assessing the links between the 18-year-old probationary driving age and youth unemployment; reviewing the impacts of separating the legal driving

age and legal drinking age; looking at international models, both positive and negative; and assessing the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll.

It is that last point I want to discuss today. In the last three days we have lost 8 people on Victorian roads — 243 people so far this year. That is 243 people who will not be sitting at the Christmas dinner table. It means that the families of those 243 people will have a different holiday experience this year. We see things like speed, distraction, fatigue, drugs and alcohol as leading contributors to the road toll, but I suspect, picking up Mr Purcell's wonderful initiative, that age might be an issue as well. We do not know the answer to that.

What is interesting is that we are absolutely outraged, it makes the front page of the paper, it appears on every news service and there is community dialogue when someone is murdered — there have been 58 homicides this year — yet it is incredible that we do not share the same outrage when someone dies on our roads. What a tragedy. What a waste of life. What a wasted opportunity. For Victorians, particularly at this time of year, there are many distractions — school holidays, people planning their annual holidays, Christmas shopping, trying to get a car park at the supermarket, filling out Christmas cards and getting them to the post office, generally taking our mind off the other things that need to be done — but we really need to recheck our mindset on this issue. We need to really think about what we are doing.

I said to my children when they got their drivers licence, 'If you happen to get an appropriate ATAR score and make your way to university, I'll get you a motor vehicle'. At my expense every one of them did. Nonetheless, when I gave them the keys to a motor vehicle after they had passed their drivers licence I said to them, 'This is probably the most powerful weapon you could ever have, and you need to treat it respectfully, not just in the way you operate your motor vehicle but by being aware of others on the road as well'.

On my way to Parliament just this morning, while stopped in traffic — I have the benefit of driving a lovely Ford Territory, which is a little bit higher on the road so you get to look across and see what is happening in the traffic — I think I counted at one intersection six people texting while they were stopped at the lights or starting to make their way across. One of them continued to text as they motored their way through the green light. I am not an expert on this issue, but the statistics say something about the fact that for

every second you have got your mind off the road your car travels an average of about 60 metres. It does not take long for traffic conditions to change in front of you while you are sending an emoji to somebody. That could be the most fatal decision you make.

We have an important role today in our Parliament, and I stand here to support Mr Purcell's motion, but equally I stand here today as a representative of the northern suburbs and therefore the people of Victoria. Let us face it, there are only 128 of us in this place who have stewardship for the people of Victoria and we need to send a message that there is no better time than today in this holiday period for people to recheck their driving habits and to be aware of what is going on around them. Somebody has claimed in the last few days that we can get to a zero road toll by 2055. For me, one is too many. If we do the maths for every fatality, there is a suite of serious injuries that sits behind that as well. There are people in our hospital system now suffering from serious injuries as a result of a motor vehicle accidents.

Some drastic action needs to be taken, so I support Mr Purcell's motion to go and ask the question. Let us go and find out and be well informed before we make hasty decisions. Let us ensure that there is a lineal relationship between the driving age and someone's opportunity to get employment, because I worry about our youth, particularly in regional Victoria, and how they access employment opportunities. This research, this inquiry, will be very valuable for Victoria. I say at this time to all Victorians: please concentrate as you get behind the wheel of a motor vehicle. Please say to your children as they get behind the wheel of a motor vehicle with that hip-hop music up loud and their phone beeping away on their lap with messages, Facebook and Twitter, 'Put the phone away. It won't make one iota of difference if you respond to that Facebook message or that Twitter message after you arrive at your destination. Please be safe'. I pray for the safety of all Victorians, and I support the motion.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak on Mr Purcell's motion to give a reference to the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to consider the impact of lowering the probationary driving age in Victoria to 17 years. I am a member of the committee and I look forward to exploring the topic via the committee process. I thank Mr Melhem for wishing the committee well; I appreciate that. I am very supportive of this motion. It is common sense to consider what the rest of the country is doing and what is happening around the world. It is wonderful that Mr Purcell from Vote 1 Local Jobs has introduced a motion that is about jobs; I could not agree with him more.

I got my drivers licence in the ACT at 16 years, 9 months and 3 hours. I was there at 9 o'clock to get my licence, and the minute I did I drove to work. I was a swimming teacher, so it enabled me to teach first thing in the morning, but I was also still training for swimming so it had the added benefit of my parents not having to get up at 5.00 a.m. every day to drive me to training. Having a licence really affected my ability to work. I remember very clearly the amount of work I could do on weekends when there was no public transport. I was living in the suburbs; I was not living in a regional area. I cannot imagine what it would be like for a young person to try to work in a regional area where there is not the same public transport as in the city and where the facilities are not as close. It is not a matter of getting on your bike and riding for 20 minutes to the local swimming pool or to the local IGA.

I was interested to hear Mr Purcell's contribution about the parents who want their children to get jobs. But how do you manage five children when two of them are doing apprenticeships? You just cannot. I know there are not enough hours in the day for most parents to make 90-minute round trips to take children to really important apprenticeships or to do something that gets them into employment. We know that the younger you start working, the more likely you are to continue working, the less likely you are to get into trouble and the more likely you are to make a great contribution to our society.

As I said, I grew up in the suburbs, where there was relatively good public transport. But there is no public transport in regional areas. Even in the suburbs I had to get to a 5.30 a.m. swimming training session or to 7.00 a.m. swimming lessons before school. There was no public transport for me, so I had to rely on my parents until, at 16 years, 9 months and 3 hours, I was able to rely on myself. Learning that independence was a very important thing to do at a young age. At 16 years and 9 months you are not 18 years old. You are still growing up and you are still considered to be a young person, but all of a sudden you have a greater degree of responsibility and independence, and that is very important.

I am really looking forward to reviewing the impacts of separating the legal age of driving and drinking during the committee's inquiry. It will be very interesting. We are well aware of the road toll statistics for people aged between 18 and 24 years and we know that alcohol is very prominent in the road toll casualties among that age group. Looking at that correlation will be very interesting. At 16 years I had a good year and a bit of driving before it was legal for me to have a drink.

I was looking at the licence regime in Canada, which is very similar to Australia. It has a whole range of licences. It has licences for people from 14 years through to 18 years. There are various forms of probationary licences and licences where you have to be accompanied by another driver. I think Australia and Victoria could look at greater flexibility. It may be that we need a whole range of licences to meet the requirements of a whole range of different communities and situations.

Mr Purcell quoted a young man, Khalid Issa, who led a great campaign to lower the driving age. He writes about the difficulties of getting a job without having a licence, and I completely appreciate that. But he also notes the driving statistics of death by state and territory. Victoria has a driving age 18 years and the rest of the states have 17 years yet the statistics show there is not a lot of difference. The toll is not noticeably lower in Victoria compared with states where 17-year-olds are allowed to drive. We are not necessarily reducing the road toll by making people wait until they are 18 years to drive. In fact the statistics show that whether you set the driving age at 17 years or 18 years the road toll does not change enormously.

The one thing that changes enormously that affects the road toll for young people is their experience in driving — that is, the number of hours they have driven. Many previous speakers have spoken about the 120 hours of driving experience needed in Victoria. Maybe that practice could start a bit younger, as I did at 16 years. I drove for quite some time with my parents before I was able to get my licence and drive independently. I think that probably made me a better driver. Some people may dispute that —

Mr Bourman interjected.

Ms PATTEN — That's right; thank you. I notice that Peter Kissinger, the president of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, says:

Turning 18 does not instantly make someone a safer driver.

Absolutely not. I think this is going to be a very interesting inquiry. I will be interested to be involved in it. I support the amendment the government has put forward. We are an ageing population, so at the other end of the spectrum — and I think this is what the committee will also look at — there are the older people who can no longer drive. How are we enabling them to still engage with their community? Also, maybe we should be looking at restricted licences for older people by looking at that end of the spectrum as well. The amendment the government has moved allows the committee to look at older drivers and all

people who do not have the benefit of being able to drive a car independently.

I commend this motion. I am very pleased Mr Purcell put it forward. In terms of Vote 1 Local Jobs, this motion is about voting 1 for local jobs. I might just say that one of our policies is reducing the voting age, so maybe we can look at that after we get the drivers licences through.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Before I call our next speaker, I would like to acknowledge Mr Andrew Ronalds, a former member of the Legislative Council, who is in the gallery. Mr Ronalds is welcome here today.

LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Reference

Debate resumed.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — I note that a number of views have been canvassed by people in this place in relation to Mr Purcell's motion, and I note that a number of issues have been proposed in relation to the lowering of the driving age and what it means for safety in Victoria. As part of road safety initiatives, the Andrews government has been on the front foot in tackling the issues of road safety. Before the government took office last year there was the development of a strategy designed to address fatalities and near misses for road users across Victoria in a range of different ways, from changes to the regulatory framework and the way in which legislation operates, to cracking down on offenders and those who do not practice safe road use, through to operational and practical treatments and better use of and engagement with technology as far as automotive advances are concerned. There is an awful lot of work to do.

We have seen that the Towards Zero strategy builds upon what was developed by members of the now government around four years ago and upon the pivotal work of organisations such as the Transport Accident Commission in combination with that of Monash University's Accident Research Centre, which has been about creating better road user awareness.

It is not just about people who drive cars; it is also about those who are in charge of heavy vehicles. In Gippsland this is an issue of particular importance

because of the extensive coexistence of heavy vehicles such as B-doubles, semitrailers and other farm machinery on roads that are often in need of repair, maintenance, upgrade or resurfacing.

This is a formidable challenge, and the combination of environmental risks and challenges, such as poor visibility, wildlife and difficult light conditions — along with the existence of often very narrow roads that have been in place for a period much longer than we have had heavy vehicles driving with this frequency on our roads — means that young people in particular are often at significant risk when they get behind the wheel of a car and attempt to navigate their way along these roads. We have also got numerous unsealed or semisealed roads in Gippsland. They are often a very popular means for people driving motorcycles and trail bikes to enjoy recreational activities, which are a fantastic way to get out and about, but safety is paramount.

In terms of road safety we see also the all-too-often fatal combination of drugs, alcohol and speed. There are very big variations between the safety of somebody who is just about to get their full licence and is still accompanied in the car, which represents pretty much the best safety situation, and that of somebody who has just got their licence but does not have the benefit of experience behind the wheel — and does not have the benefit of good decision-making, which is needed in difficult circumstances — which represents pretty much the worst safety situation.

I note that Mr Purcell's motion proposes a lowering of the driving age to 17 and includes a proposed review of the licence structures in other Australian states, particularly the probationary driving age. It is important to note that he is seeking to better understand the links between the existing 18-year-old probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas. This is again an issue of particular significance in Gippsland. In Gippsland the tyranny of distance, as many other regional members in this place would know, creates a particular disadvantage for young people who are seeking to obtain educational opportunities or find employment and gain professional experience that they can then build into a skill set that will set them on a good path for life.

The tyranny of distance also means we have insufficient resources to allow people to work often unsociable hours — for example, in the hospitality industry — where there are not buses or trains or, as there are in the metropolitan Melbourne context, trams to get people home after they have finished work. Buses, trains and trams are not there to assist in the

journey of what is often 45 minutes to 1 hour to get to a job that might start at 7.00 a.m. if the person is on the tools. In that context lowering the probationary licence age to 17 would achieve a significant benefit for young people, who would be able to drive under their own steam without needing a licensed driver to accompany them, as a consequence ensuring that young people in regional areas are not disadvantaged.

Separating the legal age for driving and the legal age for drinking is another issue, raised at item (3) of the motion — or (1)(c) of Mr Leane's amendment to the motion. In that respect I note that having an instant allocation of rights in the form of not just a driving licence but a right to legally drink creates the often fatal possibility of a perfect storm. There have been fatalities on our roads this year, and the road toll has started to rise again. This is occurring despite more than a decade's worth of very proactive work seeking to drive the toll down by creating initiatives that break those links and instil a greater sense of responsible driver culture, including in young people who have just been given their licences.

To my mind we now have to look at the way in which we afford people the privileges of having a licence on the one hand and the rights and responsibilities of being able to legally drink on the other. Again, there are many parents, many community groups and many individuals who do the right thing, but it is those few who do not who endanger not only themselves but so many others around them.

We see that is the situation in Victoria, and in regional Victoria in particular, which is overrepresented in the number of fatalities and serious injuries sustained on Victorian roads over any given calendar year. There is so much more to do in that regard, and understanding any correlation that might exist between the granting of a licence and the lawful capacity to drink is an important factor.

Understanding how we fit within the international framework is another important component of this motion. To that end I note there is significant variation across jurisdictions in Australia and also internationally in the management of driving ages and responsibilities. We have seen the introduction of a log requirement for learner drivers to record and account for their hours spent behind the wheel. That provides some comfort, but it is only one of a number of different initiatives that can and should be developed in order to better provide young people with the experience they need to take the wheel on their own for the first time in the safest possible way.

Assessing the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll is another fundamental component of this motion. In relation to this part of the motion I note that a significant proportion of the road toll itself comprises victims who are young. We lose our young people on the roads in tragic circumstances, and circumstances that are so often avoidable.

There are families who will have an extra seat at the table this Christmas. That seat will be empty. There are families who have already bought presents that will never be unwrapped. There are friends and workmates now who will say goodbye to the people they care about, who they might see on a daily basis, who they will not see again.

The issue of road safety is a social, policy and legal challenge that this house and every Parliament needs to deal with proactively, fund properly and examine thoroughly and forensically so far as research models go. The work is never done. There is no finish line for achieving best practice in road safety. In talking to this motion today I urge every single person who will take to the roads in the lead-up to this festive season, in the lead-up to one of our peak periods for fatalities and serious injuries, to make sure that they take the steps necessary to minimise risk: that they do not drink, that they remove the keys from the hands of any mates who may be drunk, that they do not get into a car with anyone under the influence of medication or illicit drugs and that they do not allow any of their mates to drive under those circumstances.

It is heartbreaking to read of fatalities on our roads, but it is even more heartbreaking to be directly and personally affected by that empty chair at Christmas and by those presents that will not be opened because they were bought for somebody who never made it home.

Another important part of this motion is understanding how to equip our transport infrastructure and services for people of a non-driving age in regional Victoria by making sure that people have the best support available to get to that job, to understand which bus routes might be available or to call on somebody to give them a lift to somewhere that they need to be. Understanding what that means in practical terms for people who may live 100 kilometres away from the nearest town, 100 kilometres away from the start of that job, is an important part of Mr Purcell's motion.

We need to examine strategies which will meaningfully allow governments, people who sit behind desks, people who sit in offices and people like us in this

chamber to understand the barriers faced by people of a non-driving age in accessing employment, study and training. To that end the acknowledgement of the disadvantage that is occasioned because of the tyranny of distance is something which I welcome as part of this motion.

It is fundamentally important to make sure that people can access public transport and support networks that enable them to get to their jobs, their school, their TAFE or their courses or to collect their children from after-school care. Without that support, without those strategies and without that infrastructure we run the very significant risk that again there will be more empty seats at the table this Christmas, that again there will be people who will get that telephone call or that knock at the door because of something that was avoidable. We need proper risk management, proper education and proper driver training; we need to combine the best of technology with changes to improve road safety on an environmental level; and we need to have an enhanced appreciation of the fact that getting behind the wheel of a car is an inherently risky thing to do.

I support the motion put by Mr Purcell, with the amendment moved by Mr Leane. I congratulate Mr Purcell for continuing to put road safety at the front and centre of the government's policy agenda. It is a crucially important thing that we need to be mindful of. It is our obligation as lawmakers to never stop the work to improve road safety. The work itself may never, ever be done, but hopefully we can change the culture of road use for the better over the course of our own lifetimes.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to speak in support of Mr Purcell's motion requesting that the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee inquire into the impacts of lowering the driving age to 17. I also support the government's amendment. The motion has various parts.

I will start out by saying that I first learnt to drive when I was 14 — just for the record, legally. I was living on a rural farm. It is fair to say I made a lot of mistakes. Fortunately I was pretty well on my own in a paddock most of the time, and if I made a mistake and the car had a new scratch or needed some sort of repair, the only person I had to explain it to was my dad. I am not suggesting we lower the driving age to 14, but it can be beneficial to be able to learn to drive before you are allowed to drink.

I have been touched by the road toll. As a younger man there was an accident in which one of my friends died. I never saw him grow up, never saw him get married,

never lost touch with him and caught up with him again — all those sorts of things. That is a reality of the road toll. Just because it happened when I was young does not mean that young people are any more or less responsible, because road safety is about attitude. It is not about whether you are aged 17 or 18. I know middle-aged people to whom I would not give a spud gun, and then there are teenagers who are quite capable of being in control of a motor vehicle.

If we look at the problems we see on the roads, we see people on their mobile phones, we see intoxication, we see inattention, we see no seatbelts being worn. No seatbelts is one of my bugbears. I would not be here if it were not for seatbelts, and I still cannot understand in this day and age why people get into a car and do not put on a seatbelt — it is basic. There are also drivers on illicit and prescription drugs. It is clear that it is not just people using illegal drugs who are a problem on the road; plenty of people on legal prescription drugs are in no fit state to drive. Ms Patten's call for an inquiry into their use will no doubt go into that issue.

As I understand it, we are the only state in Australia that does not have a law where you can start driving at 17 years of age. It has been quite a while — many more years than I care to admit — since I learnt to drive. I had to wait until I was 16 or 17 years old to get my L-plates. Then at the age of 18 I got on my P-plates, and away I went. It is a bit weird that we are the only state in Australia where you have to be aged 18 to get a probationary licence. It is something that Mr Purcell's proposed inquiry would probably go most to uncovering — why are we so out of step?

Turning to the essence of the motion, lowering the probationary driving age to 17 is not just going to free up young people to do what they want — to go to work, to have fun and to get experience before they are of drinking age — but it also frees up parents. I look at my electorate, where it is 400 kilometres to 500 kilometres from one end to the other, and if you have children who are of apprenticeship age or are only able to get a job in a neighbouring town, then you have no choice.

By its very nature public transport in rural and remote areas is not a very good option. I have been told numerous times about the trains from Traralgon; the 6.00 a.m. train is standing room only. If you are a youngster in Traralgon and you need to get to Melbourne — not that I would suggest driving on the freeways, because they are not much better at the best of times — it presents another problem in life that you really do not need. In that situation, if you are not driven somewhere, it becomes a problem. As we know, tradies tend to start early and finish early, and most

people doing apprenticeships find that out, so it is incumbent upon friends of driving age and parents to have to adjust. If you have an hour's drive to one town, then an hour's drive home and then you have to go to work, I can only imagine what that is going to do to your day.

The possibility of the road toll increasing if we were to lower the probationary driving age is most certainly a reality, and it needs to be explored. I listened to Ms Patten's contribution earlier, where she basically said the road toll in relation to people above the age of 18 can change. Whilst the possibility of having a legally licensed 17-year-old driver as a road toll statistic is certainly there, getting more experience may well help further down the track. By the time they get to 18 years and they are allowed to drink — they should never drink and drive — they will at least have some sort of motor skills and experience behind them. It could well have a neutral or even a negative effect on the road toll. As we have seen, anything is worth a try.

The Towards Zero campaign says one person dead is one person too many. It is an ambitious campaign, but we have to think outside the square. Pure enforcement will never work. I have seen many times reports on the news about the road toll, and reports where someone has been ejected from a car. As soon as I know someone was ejected from a car, I know what they were not wearing, even in this day and age with all the little bells and whistles that go off if you do not put your seatbelt on — and it is not just young people; all sorts of people are not putting them on. I can assure the house that from experience what you see when you get there is not pretty.

On the issue of international standards, as well as Victoria being out of step within Australia, clearly we need to look at the situation in the US and Europe. In the US the driving age is quite low and the drinking age is quite high. In a way that might be counterproductive because you are getting 18-year-olds who can vote, be drafted — can go off and do all this sort of stuff — but they cannot have a beer. What do they do? They have a beer, and they do it on the sly. It is a very strange arrangement. I remember reading numerous things about people who are drafted. They are in a war zone, killing and being killed, and yet they are not allowed to have a drink. It is just bizarre.

I have not used up all my allocated time but that about sums up my contribution. The Shooters and Fishers certainly support this motion and the government's amendment. It is something we need to look into.

I will recap by saying that age is not the problem; it is experience. We need to look at it with a holistic approach, and the proposed inquiry would give us that opportunity. That is what parliamentary inquiries are for. We should not be afraid of asking questions, we should not be afraid of putting it to ourselves and we should not be afraid of doing what we are meant to be doing, which is trying to improve people's lives. We do a lot of banning this and banning that and changing this and changing that, but we are also in a position where we can try to use our experience to look into things that could be adjusted a little bit.

I go back to the recent campaign on drugs. We seem to focus wholly on illicit drugs. From experience I am aware of many people who are clearly not in a fit state to drive but have broken no law. That will also be a problem to those people; they are generally on a prescription drug for a medical reason and not for recreation. If they are not able to drive, there needs to be a system that will help them. If that is improving public transport, then that should include suburban areas as well as rural and regional areas where, as I mentioned, public transport is not that hot. You cannot really catch a bus from Mallacoota to Sale or somewhere like that — or at least not unless you pack your lunch.

As I said, the Shooters and Fishers Party supports this motion and the amendment, and I am glad that they have bipartisan support.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to commence, before question time, my contribution to the debate on Mr Purcell's motion in relation to creating a reference for the joint parliamentary committee on law reform, road and community safety. I have enjoyed today's debate, which has also presented an opportunity to debate the general premise of road safety. I would like to reflect on some of the strategies of consecutive governments but also the history of the Labor government's approach to road safety.

Given the number of lives saved since the driving age was raised to 18, there is a lot of hesitation in lowering it again. However, that does not mean that exploring the connection between the driving age and road fatalities is without merit. The Andrews government is very firm in its commitment to improving road safety and seeing zero lives lost on Victorian roads. When it comes to young drivers aged 25 and under, they continue to be over-represented in road fatalities making up fewer than 15 per cent of licensed drivers on our roads but representing a quarter of all driver deaths.

It is an indisputable fact that young and inexperienced drivers face the greatest risks on our roads, and we as a government believe it is our duty to protect young lives by supporting and educating young drivers and providing them with the knowledge and experience that they require to be the safest they can be on our roads.

Since the graduated licensing system was introduced in Victoria in 2007 we have seen a significant reduction in the rates of death and serious injury for young people on our roads. Specifically the graduated licensing system includes mandating 120 hours of logged, supervised driving for young learner drivers, introducing a two-stage probationary licence, introducing peer passenger restrictions for young probationary drivers, prohibiting young drivers from driving high-powered vehicles and using new media strategies to engage young people about road safety.

The program is internationally recognised. I understand that the Transport Accident Commission is in high demand for presentations, lectures and education from countries that do not have the best record in road safety and that aspire to achieve the inroads that we have made in the reduction in road deaths and road injuries.

The key success of the graduated licensing system lies in providing young drivers with experience over an extended time frame and initially under conditions of low risk. As the driver gains experience, restrictions on driving are gradually lifted as the driver has more hours under their belt. But the graduated licensing system is just one piece of the puzzle. There is no silver bullet that can reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries for young drivers, so it is important that we have better education and training across the board and that we have a number of complementary programs that support our licensing stages.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Vocational education and training

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills. The Australian Education Union (AEU) president, Meredith Peace, is calling for government funding for private for-profit providers to be limited to 30 per cent of the vocational education and training budget. Is that policy supported by the Andrews government?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — The Andrews government has been absolutely crystal clear on this matter. We support a

contestable training system, but one which gives better value to the taxpayer by it being more aligned with industry, one where industry's needs are met and where job outcomes are a product of the training system and one where TAFEs are strengthened. We have the Mackenzie review, which the government is looking at right now. In regard to the 70 per cent, no, the government does not support that position.

Supplementary question

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — As the minister has just identified, the former Labor government introduced a system that is 'fully contestable funding at all qualification levels between all eligible providers', a system that is not supported by the AEU, so I ask: if not the current system, which is based on student enrolments, what is the Andrews government's preferred funding percentage targets for private for-profit providers in 2016?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I say that the AEU is the AEU. It represents its members in TAFE institutes and schools. In any democracy the AEU is entitled to have its opinion, and I respect that opinion, but that does not mean that the government always agrees with it. What we do have commonality in is a desire to see our TAFE institutes strengthened and the dodgy providers that flourished under the previous government with a light regulatory regime out of the system and not getting government funding. We are moving quickly on that.

In regard to 2016, the 2016 contracts are currently out there and are being evaluated. Registered training organisations have put in expressions of interest in the same way as has happened every year, the difference being that we have substantially tightened up the contractual arrangements to get more accountability for taxpayer funds.

Ms Bath — On a point of order, President, I ask that you consider that answer. My question was in relation to percentage targets for private for-profit providers.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will consider that. I ask the member to give me a copy of her question.

Mr Herbert — On the point of order, President, Ms Bath was turning around, chatting away while I gave the substantive answer that the contracts are already in and it is the same process as each of the previous years, except with tighter contracts.

Mrs Peulich — On the point of order, President, clearly you have the supplementary question in your

hand. We were simply discussing that, and being females we can actually do two things at the same time.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mrs Peulich might reflect on my attitude to vexatious points of order.

Mrs Peulich — It was not vexatious.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mrs Peulich and I both know there was no point of order, and to actually come to a point that simply reflects on the extraordinary capacity of women, which has absolutely nothing to do with the minister's answer or the question, I think is pushing it very close.

Mrs Peulich — Further on the point of order, President, I do respect your comments; however, the minister in his point of order made a reference to the fact that Ms Bath and I were talking whilst he was answering, and what I wanted to point out was: this does not preclude us from listening to what he was saying.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Then it might have been better to express it that way rather than to suggest that women can do two things at once.

Questions interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take the opportunity welcome a former member of this house to the gallery, Mr Noel Pullen, a former member for Higinbotham.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Questions resumed.

Victoria Police

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My question without notice is to the Leader of the Government. I refer to a most concerning report released today by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, which has found a culture of abuse and harassment within Victoria Police. The report makes 20 recommendations to government and Victoria Police. Noting that the police budget is already under extreme pressure, with closed police stations and other existing resource challenges, I ask: does the government commit today to fully fund the cost to implement all the recommendations without any impact on Victoria Police service delivery?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr O'Donohue for his question, and I apologise to the house for my late arrival. I had been waiting optimistically for 17 hours for a prominent member of the parliamentary Liberal Party to knock on my door, and they knocked on my door at 1 minute to 12 o'clock, so my apologies for being delayed by that arrival.

The issue in relation to the very distressing circumstances that have led to two recent reports commenting on inappropriate behaviour that occurs within the police force, which has included intimidation or predatory behaviour by police officers, is very concerning to the Victorian government, very concerning to police command and very concerning to any reasonably minded citizen in Victoria, who want to make sure that our police operate on the highest level of professional and personal standards in this state so that the community can have confidence in them acquitting their responsibilities.

The government recognises the significance of these issues and understands the importance of the remedies that have been recommended in the report that has been released today to ensure not only that there is appropriate support and comfort provided to those who have been the victims of these inappropriate behaviours but that there is an appropriate cultural and disciplinary regime that applies within the police force. We must ensure that these practices are removed, that the disciplinary arrangements are in place that can provide confidence to victims and indeed that other people within the police force or in the community who witness inappropriate behaviour and report these matters are responded to accordingly.

Within the scope of the recommendations that have been provided in the report, I personally have not been briefed on the cost implications. I certainly know the government's intention will be to appropriately scope and become aware of those cost implications, and I am certain that the government's intention will be to provide for the maximum delivery of those recommendations, to deal with the financial consequences in enabling those to occur and also at the same time not to intrude on police operational matters. As I say, I have not got the spreadsheet of the cost structures of those recommendations before me; I am not in a position to be able to provide that confidence today. I am not certain how long that would actually take to be verified, but I certainly know it will be the intention of the government not to impact on operational matters within the police adversely in making sure that police command implements those recommendations.

Supplementary question

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I thank the Leader of the Government for his answer, and without repeating yesterday's experience, I think that the minister was saying in response to my question that the government will appropriately resource the recommendations made without causing impact upon service delivery, and I thank the minister for that explanation and that answer. Noting the minister's response that he does not yet have the understanding of those cost implications, I ask by way of supplementary that when the minister is availed of that information he make that publicly known and make that available to the opposition. That would be my request by way of supplementary question.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Personally I would love to be able to provide to the satisfaction of the house any answer that becomes available to me. There are some limits on the availability of information I can share, because in fact some information is not in a form that I can actually provide it. I am certain that my colleague the Minister for Police will have primary carriage of these matters and would be preparing the appropriate budgetary response and bringing it to the rest of the government to deal with.

I am sure the police minister would also be working with police command to work out the way in which the human resource management and the cultural elements of its educational programs and professional development that reinforce some of those recommendations, which already exist, are mindful of the way in which they are reconfigured or redefined to deliver those outcomes. Some of those things will be internally funded, and some of them will be additionally determined. As that information becomes available, I will be happy to share what is available to me.

Melbourne Metro rail project

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Leader of the Government. I refer the leader to a news release from the then Minister for Planning dated 4 October 2006 which guaranteed that the South Yarra siding reserve would be protected as public land in perpetuity. Is the South Yarra siding reserve the very same land that will be sacrificed for the tunnel exit of the Melbourne Metro in South Yarra?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — It would be unwise of me to speculate on a matter that I do not have the answer to. I am happy to take advice on that subject.

Supplementary question

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — In taking that advice — and I appreciate that the minister is prepared to do that — I draw his attention to the release of Wednesday, 4 October 2006, headed 'South Yarra siding reserve in public hands for good', and I go further to ask him — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DAVIS — 'Public open space' is the reference in the news release — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DAVIS — I am referring members to the heading of the news release, which goes on — in response to interjections — to talk about public open space. I therefore ask: will the minister confirm that the South Yarra siding reserve will be sacrificed as public park land despite the Melbourne Metro having no South Yarra station connection for the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I invite the minister to respond. My interpretation is that it is further to that land — that it is exploring the matter further in detail.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — It certainly was an unusual form for a supplementary question, but in some ways it is supplementary because it asks for an additional level of detail beyond what was provided. Another interpretation is that it is the same question asked again; the same answer will be provided on this occasion.

Greater Geelong City Council

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State, also the Leader of the Government, who is the minister responsible for local government integrity. Noting the appointment of a board of inquiry at the Greater Geelong City Council, will the history of bullying on the part of Labor councillors Andy Richards and Jan Farrell be the focus of the inquiry, or will Labor misbehaviour be swept under the carpet?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am in some difficulty in the sense that I am not aware of these matters or of whether or not these matters are in the public domain in terms of issues at Geelong. In fact I must confess that I did not even know that a panel had been appointed or that an investigation had been launched, so to that extent I am unable to adjudicate on the validity of this question in the context of my

attitudes to intruding on political party matters. However, from the tenor of the question that has been put, it would seem to me that the question relates to the conduct of people in public office, which is therefore a matter that is relevant to the public record. I am not in a position with any other knowledge to rule the matter out, so I invite the minister to respond to that question.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Thank you, President. I appreciate your consideration of the question that Mr Davis asked. The first issue I want to draw attention to is the very partisan nature of the question and the self-serving and selective nature of the question, and indeed in my answer I am not in any shape or form confirming any aspect of the allegation that Mr Davis has framed within his question.

The inquiry that is being undertaken will look at the behaviour of all councillors and their relationship with the council staff of the City of Greater Geelong, and this inquiry has been formed on the basis of advice that came to my colleague the Minister for Local Government, who then provided me with some advice about the way in which the administration, the behaviour of councillors and the council are worthy of examination and independent scrutiny. My colleague has taken action. I support that action, and I am not in a position to be able to talk about the aspects of that inquiry in any further detail. I absolutely repeat my refuting of any allegation put on the public record by Mr Davis or what he may be seeking to obtain through his question.

Supplementary question

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — It is important to note that some of those matters that I referred to are matters of public record. My supplementary question is: will all of the information that was collected during the workplace culture review undertaken by Susan Halliday be available to the board of inquiry that has been appointed?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — One of the difficulties that Mr Davis provides us with evidence for time and time again is that he sometimes does not quite appreciate how due process works. Due process relies on some independence in relation to the way in which inquiries are undertaken and the professional acumen of the inquirers or the inspectors who are appointed to acquit their responsibilities. They will form a view about the information that should be made available to them. It would be my expectation that if they seek information which is relevant, it will be available to them. I think it would be premature to start

intruding and speculating on the sources of information that the inquirers may seek.

Mr Davis — On a point of order, President, my question was very specific and referred to a particular review of workplace culture that occurred at Geelong. I am seeking a very clear indication from the minister as to whether that exact review would be released to the relevant board, but he did not mention the Halliday review once.

Ms Shing — It does not flow from the initial question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Shing and I sometimes have different views as to how apposite some of the supplementary questions are. I believe the question was in order because it did go to a report that presumably had discussed some of the matters that were pertinent in the substantive question.

In respect of the minister's answer, for starters, as members know, I cannot direct a minister in terms of how to answer, but I think the minister's response was responsive to the supplementary question despite the fact that he did not happen to use the report's name. His response was that it is up to the panel of inquiry to seek out whatever information it needs to complete its task. As a pure layman, I would have thought that that would be one of the first documents it might reach for, if it was in existence. The minister has certainly not indicated that it is out of bounds; he simply said that it is up to the inquiry to determine what information it requires to satisfy it, and I think that is a responsive answer to the supplementary question.

Infrastructure Victoria

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State. Legislation for Infrastructure Victoria has been in place for three months, the board has been in place for two months, the chief executive has now been appointed and the agency has been assigned an annual budget of \$10 million, so I ask: why was Infrastructure Victoria not consulted about the western distributor project, given the business case was only forwarded to the federal government last week?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Rich-Phillips for his question. It is a reasonable question, unlike the way this was dealt with by his side in the other place. The provocative way that Infrastructure Victoria has been dealt with by the opposition in the Legislative Assembly has led to a very defensive and perhaps bullish response from my

colleagues in the other place. I do not feel the need to do that, because that has not been our experience of the consideration of Infrastructure Victoria in this chamber. We had a fulsome committee stage. We understand the importance of establishing a program for Infrastructure Victoria, developing an expectation of it driving a 30-year strategy of infrastructure pipeline as its primary task. It has residual capacity to have a look at the intervening government response to the 30-year strategy, to make comments on it and to then have a further power to look at the value of specific proposals.

As the lengthy committee stage of the bill in this chamber discussed, we are at a pivot point in its establishment, between pre-existing projects that have either been committed to by the government — for instance, the 50 level crossings removal program across metropolitan Melbourne, which we are very determined to deliver on, and the Melbourne Metropolitan rail system that we are committed to and which has been preloaded — or indeed what was just announced, which is the consideration of the market-led proposal in relation to the western distributor. Those were all projects that were announced and processes that were commenced before the establishment of Infrastructure Victoria.

We always indicated that whilst Infrastructure Victoria in the years to come will be able to look at, in real time, the consideration of market-led proposals — and that has not been deserted by the government — what we are talking about at this moment —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JENNINGS — Opposition members have been fairly considered in their responses up until this series of interjections. In the other place, after we adopted it fulsomely here, on its very first day out its board appointments were assaulted by the opposition in the Assembly. From day one, before board members even began their task of establishing the bipartisan — hopefully — non-political 30-year strategy, before they even embarked upon their method they were under political assault. Why would a government want to, at this moment, with pre-existing projects that have already gone through a process before Infrastructure Victoria has developed its street cred in relation to being bipartisan, be put into a position where it is making instantaneous assessments of what might be politically charged projects that may not be projects the opposition supports, given the opposition's track record of making issues political?

In fact, to be perfectly honest, in opposition we did as well; I acknowledge that. At no stage have I baulked

from that. We said the east–west project should not proceed. We said we would take it to the election, and we acted accordingly after the election. We do not want that to occur in the future. We do not want political argy-bargy about these matters. We do not want to throw Infrastructure Victoria into the deep end in assessing projects that have already gone some way through the approval process before it develops its 30-year plan.

Supplementary question

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. The minister referred a number of times to the 30-year plan that Infrastructure Victoria is charged with establishing. The question relates to Infrastructure Victoria's consideration of individual projects, which is also part of its brief, so I ask: has the government referred any specific individual projects to Infrastructure Victoria for advice or comment?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — No, we have not, for the very reason that I just outlined.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JENNINGS — Opposition members may have chosen to interject significantly for the last minute of my answer, but if they had stopped interjecting and started listening, they would have heard me outline the reasons why the government, on balance, has decided to give Infrastructure Victoria clear air to establish its 30-year strategic pipeline of infrastructure investment rather than be subjected to the carry-on that the opposition is quite capable of, on any given day, of contaminating its work and not even allowing it to be established or to receive some credibility on a bipartisan basis across Victoria. The 30-year horizon has been selected by this government as a way in which we can finally overcome the political argy-bargy that those opposite want us to dive into. We are not going to.

Infrastructure Victoria

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is again to the Special Minister of State and again relates to Infrastructure Victoria. In response to a question about why Infrastructure Victoria had been bypassed on the western distributor project, the Premier indicated the project 'went through similar and thorough scrutiny by officials'. If, in the Premier's words, officials are able to provide similar and thorough scrutiny on the project, what role will exist for Infrastructure Victoria in providing scrutiny on individual projects?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Rich-Phillips for his question. The question has probably taken a shorthand version of the full and complete answer of the Premier, because I am certain the Premier would be mindful that the market-led proposal that he is referring to — the western distributor — went through an independent process. That independent process at the early stages of the market-led proposal assessment was undertaken by Kerry Schott and Tony Canavan, who were contracted by the government to make an assessment.

I have talked about that independent assessment previously in the house. It may be in the memory bank of the opposition. Those opposite may have forgotten that there has already been discussion in question time about that independent assessment to enable the market-led proposal to go from stage 1 to stage 2. In fact the government announced the creation of that independent panel by Kerry Schott and Tony Canavan. The member may selectively try to say that that is a method that will in the future be available to Infrastructure Victoria to assess projects, when Infrastructure Victoria is up and running, as a method that is accepted and recognised by the community as being rigorous and independent. The government chose, through this process, to give maximum independent and appropriate scrutiny to enable it to go to the market-led proposal stages.

It was not exclusively an assessment by Department of Treasury and Finance officers. It was not necessarily exclusively the domain of high-risk, high-value proposals. It was independently assessed by those two well-recognised individuals, who have great standing in infrastructure assessment and capability across this nation. The government is very proud of the fact that we made that wise decision. It is a great pity that that has not been remembered by the opposition.

Questions interrupted.

MOTIONS TO TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Infrastructure Victoria

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That the Minister for Utopia's answer be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Davis will permit me to vary his motion to a form that is more acceptable to the Chair and, I think, to the dignity of the house. That is:

That the minister's answer be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

I have already reflected on those throwaway lines, which I think are inappropriate. I do not want to hear them.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Infrastructure Victoria

Questions resumed.

Supplementary question

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. I point out, though, that the principal question was not a construction by the opposition. It related to comments attributed to the Premier yesterday, when he was specifically asked why Infrastructure Victoria had not looked at this project. He referred to similar and thorough scrutiny by officials. Members of the government in this house have spoken about the role of Infrastructure Victoria in assessing individual projects. That has been raised a number of times by members of the government in this house. I ask: in view of what the minister has already informed the house about his intention for Infrastructure Victoria initially, and given what has been attributed to the Premier about the western distributor project, what criteria will the government use to determine which individual projects should undergo Infrastructure Victoria consideration?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The criteria that will be used are similar to the criteria that have already been described by me in my two substantive answers. I have already said the government appreciates that for market-led proposals of a significant order of magnitude that come to the government, such as the western distributor, there needs to be appropriate independent verification of the scope and appropriateness for those projects to be pursued. It would also be available to the government to seek independent assessment of procurement and appropriate models — an in-house build or a public-private partnership model — for major projects into the future. The government will be taking advice from independent sources about those matters.

Government procurement policy

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Finance, Mr Jennings. Australia's only integrated manufacturer of office copy papers and printing and publishing papers is, as the minister would know, located here in Victoria. It is called Australian Paper. Australian Paper supports 6000 jobs and generates \$754 million towards Australia's gross domestic product. The company also contributes \$432 million to the annual revenues of state and federal governments through taxes and direct purchases. I could go on, but I am sure everyone appreciates the value of supporting Victorian-made products. My point is this: I believe the Victorian government should have in place procurement policies that cover, for example, state government departments and even encourage the offices of MPs such that Victorian paper products are given priority over imported and often inferior products. My question is quite simple: will the government support a review of procurement policies in the area of paper products, and if so, when can we expect such a review to take place?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Dr Carling-Jenkins for her question. Indeed the simple answer to the question is yes. Already my ministerial colleague the Minister for Finance has written to all my cabinet colleagues seeking their support for the outcomes Dr Carling-Jenkins has described and asking about the current situation in terms of our procurement policies.

My colleague the Minister for Industry continues to be vigilant and determined to try to make sure that the Victorian industry participation program is given full effect and will work with my colleague the Minister for Finance to try to ensure that we provide appropriate support and a market base for Victorian-made products to find themselves within the public sector or more broadly to determine what market opportunities may be available to us.

My colleague the Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Agriculture reminded me as the member was completing her question that the federal government's intervention in this space of recent times has not been necessarily helpful. The Victorian government will be trying to take some counter-directions in terms of policy settings, because it in fact accepts the logic, the principle and the outcome the member is trying to obtain on behalf of Victorian industry. We will look at ways in which we can do it, and hopefully we will not be adversely impacted by commonwealth reforms in this area.

Ambulance services

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Families and Children, representing the Minister for Emergency Services. Lynette Collie from Mumbannar, a hamlet near the South Australian border, contacted me and related that last week a 75-year-old gentleman collapsed and required an ambulance at the Dartmoor Golf Club. The ambulance was called at 3.00 p.m., and the staff were told not to move the man, who lay on the concrete verandah to wait for the service. At 3.40 p.m., after the man felt worse, staff contacted the ambulance service again and were told that the ambulance had been dispatched with lights flashing and sirens blazing but could not be given details of where it was coming from, when it may arrive or where it was. At 3.50 p.m. the ambulance arrived from Heywood, which is some 25 minutes away, but it took 50 minutes. I ask the minister: what is being done to improve response times for emergency services in rural Victoria?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for his question regarding ambulance response times, and I share the member's concerns about this matter. Under the coalition government ambulance response times deteriorated significantly. In 2013–14 ambulance response times were the worst on the Australian mainland.

I am disappointed to hear about the experience that this particular gentleman had in not receiving a timely ambulance response as he would have expected, and I would be grateful if the member were able to provide further details about this particular instance so that the Minister for Ambulance Services can follow up the details of this case and investigate the particular matter and provide further contact with the gentleman involved.

We know that ambulance response times are not good enough. They are not meeting the community's expectations, and this is why the government is doing a significant amount of work to improve response times right across Victoria, including in regional Victoria. One of the first actions of the Andrews Labor government was to establish the Ambulance Performance and Policy Consultative Committee. That committee released an interim report in March, and it found that dispatch now takes 1 minute longer compared to six years ago and that almost 60 per cent of emergency incidents were classified as code 1 but that on arrival paramedics found that a code 1 response was not required.

These issues reflect an ambulance system that was left in crisis by the previous coalition government — —

Mr Davis interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — The former responsible minister should stop interjecting, because we know how things deteriorated under his watch. The committee has been undertaking significant work this year to address this crisis. The government has already taken action. We have invested \$99 million to improve our ambulance service and to improve response times. That includes — —

Mr Davis interjected.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Mr Davis

The PRESIDENT — Order! Under standing order 13.02, I ask Mr Davis to vacate the chamber for 15 minutes.

Mr Davis withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Ambulance services

Questions resumed.

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — Our government has taken a range of actions already. We have invested \$99 million to improve our ambulance services and improve response times. That includes \$20 million to upgrade ambulance stations and \$20 million to upgrade vehicles and equipment. We have removed the bypass to improve ambulance distribution right across the system and ensure that patients are transported to their local hospital.

These and other reforms are already yielding positive results. We have arrested the decline in response times that occurred under the coalition government, and we are beginning to see improvement. The first quarter of this financial year showed a 3 per cent improvement in response times when compared to the same quarter last year under the previous government. This is an improvement of 30 seconds, and we know that every second makes a difference in relation to these matters.

There is more work to be done to improve our response times and rebuild the community's confidence in our

ambulance services, and this government is absolutely committed to doing just that. The Ambulance Performance and Policy Consultative Committee will deliver its final report by the end of the year, and that report will detail further reform that needs to be undertaken to improve response times right across Victoria, including in rural and regional Victoria.

Supplementary question

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I thank the minister for her response. The gentleman is okay, by the way. Considering the Dartmoor Golf Club could not get details of where the ambulance left from, where it was or how long it was going to take, why is it that if I order a pizza from Domino's, I can track on my phone its progress from when my order arrived in the store to when the pizza went into the oven and then track on GPS the delivery driver's progress all the way to my front door? Even Uber uses GPS tracking so you can watch your illegal ride approach through a mobile phone app. I ask the minister: why is it that a pizza delivery service and an illegal taxi service are able to provide more information on their progress to their customers than our emergency services?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank Mr Purcell for his supplementary question. The dispatch of ambulances is a significantly more complex issue than pizza delivery or even a taxi service. The call-and-dispatch system administered by ESTA, the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, manages constant and competing demands on ambulance resources, so when a code 1 case call is received there is a reprioritisation that takes place to ensure that life-threatening cases receive the most urgent response.

It is often the case that an ambulance en route responding to a low-acuity case will be diverted to respond to a code 1 case; it is not therefore possible to always be able to track the progress of an ambulance that has been dispatched. However, it is also true that for our most urgent cases there are sometimes multiple ambulances dispatched, so additionally this government has expanded the emergency response program to the Country Fire Authority, ensuring that in addition to dispatching an ambulance, other emergency responses might also be dispatched in response.

Firefighter cancer compensation

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State. As the minister would be aware, many firefighters, both career and volunteer, and their families are becoming very

anxious about presumptive legislation and when it will be introduced. Obviously their concern is about it providing fair coverage for firefighters with cancer and what detail the bill may have. The minister can understand how difficult it is for firefighters who are touched by industrial cancers and that they should not have to worry about their finances and their medical treatment. Obviously in previous times this has been extraordinarily difficult, and I would like to give them some relief from their anxiety, so my question is: when will an exposure draft on this legislation be made public, and when exactly in 2016 does the government intend to introduce presumptive legislation to the Parliament?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Ms Hartland for the interest she has demonstrated not only today but over a long period of time in terms of the resolution of these matters. On this side of the house we have joined in our desire to ensure that we introduce this legislation. The government has actively considered those matters during the course of this year, and recently my colleagues the Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Finance have led active discussions within the government to ensure that we apprise ourselves of the various models used in other jurisdictions. For instance, Tasmania is often cited as a jurisdiction we may wish to model ourselves on when it comes to the availability of access for professional and volunteer firefighters to open, reliable and, as much as possible, equitable outcomes.

What we have seen in recent times in terms of the underlying anxiety and concern that is evident amongst firefighters both on the professional side and on the volunteer side is an escalation of either industrial or campaigning issues that have not necessarily assisted in the dispassionate reconciliation of how you design a scheme to come through and provide appropriate access. In fact there has been some counterproductive campaigning undertaken to try to divide the firefighting community and the Victorian community, rather than assist in an amicable resolution of these matters.

The issues concerned in the demonstration outside were not primarily driven through the prism of presumptive rights; they were in relation to unresolved enterprise bargaining issues — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I am very optimistic that the government will be able early in the new year to resolve both of these matters. My colleagues are anticipating coming back to cabinet in the new year with specific proposals which would then enable us to go into the public domain to make the community very

clear about the scope of how we think we can provide an equitable, reasonable and compassionate response to great health concerns.

I would anticipate that early in the new year there will be a public exposure of these issues, if not the exposure of a piece of legislation which would underpin these proposals. But ultimately that timing will be dependent upon my colleague the Minister for Emergency Services, supported quite enthusiastically and fulsomely by the Minister for Finance.

Supplementary question

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister. My supplementary question — and I know the minister has covered it somewhat in his answer — is around volunteers. The minister is correct; there is a campaign running. Personally I was a bit shocked at it, considering it seems to be coming from The Nationals and the Liberal Party, which blocked this legislation at every turn in the last Parliament, and given Mr Guy, the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, has now said in the public domain they got it wrong. Can I have some assurances for those volunteers that they will be considered with equity in this legislation?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Ms Hartland will note that I resisted the temptation to talk about the duplicity, if not the hypocrisy, of other members of Parliament. Ms Hartland chose to take us there, and if people reflect on their actions in the past compared to their current actions, then maybe that is a worthy outcome of her question. I would think that is a good thing. I would think it is good for all of us to unite as a Parliament on these matters.

Within what is equitable in relation to the design, the equitable situation is the complex issue about what the preconditions are by which eligibility for presumption is determined. For full-time professional firefighters in the metropolitan area who go to many events that have intense outcomes, that is relatively clear. For others, it is a more complex formula that needs to be accounted for in the work that is being undertaken.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I have written answers to the following questions on notice: 43, 45, 1226, 1512–27, 1991–92, 2008, 2426–27, 2456, 2466, 2479–80, 2500–02, 2504, 2507–08, 2510–15, 2518–21, 2531, 2583–84, 2616, 3888, 4043–44, 4261, 4350, 4393–94, 4398.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Written responses

The PRESIDENT — Order! In respect of today's questions I have a question from Mr Davis to Mr Jennings in regard to a piece of land that he identified, which he expected was to be retained as public open space. He asked whether or not this land was now possibly going to be used for another purpose. The minister and the house were not in a position to understand if what was being talked about was the same piece of land, so the minister has undertaken on both the substantial and the supplementary question to identify the particular land that is referred to in the question, what considerations might have been made for the use of that land and whether or not they have changed from a previous occasion. That is a two-day response time.

Mr Rich-Phillips's supplementary question on his second question to Mr Jennings went to criteria that might be used for referring projects to Infrastructure Victoria. The minister provided some advice to the house on some of the matters that might be explored as part of that process, but I am not sure that it met the test of the criteria that Mr Rich-Phillips is looking for, so I ask for a response — only in respect of the supplementary question — to the second question posed by Mr Rich-Phillips. It went to the question of criteria on projects that might be sent to Infrastructure Victoria. Is that in the minister's domain?

Mr Jennings — Yes, it is in my domain.

The PRESIDENT — Then it is tomorrow for a response.

Mr Jennings — Otherwise I indicate that Mr Rich-Phillips has had a very good day.

The PRESIDENT — He is smiling. In relation to Ms Bath's supplementary question on percentage, I sought from the minister some clarification of his answer. There was a bit too much interjection and noise today around a number of questions, which made it difficult for me to determine whether or not some answers were responsive to questions. It obviously also makes it very difficult not just for the minister but for Hansard in recording the proceedings and looking for an accurate record of matters. That record is relied on by members and often quoted back at ministers on subsequent occasions, so it is important that we maintain the decorum of the house not just for the sake of everybody recognising the respect within the house

but also from a practical point of view to make sure that Hansard is able to maintain an accurate record.

In the case of Ms Bath's question to Mr Herbert, I had some difficulty in determining whether or not the answer did go to her question. The minister and I have had a brief conversation, and I thank him for that courtesy. The question went to whether or not there was a percentage target for private for-profit providers in the contracts in 2016. I could ask the minister for a written response, but he has indicated to me that he could clarify that now. Is that the case?

Mr Herbert — Yes.

The PRESIDENT — Order! With the courtesy of the house I ask the minister to dispatch that one instantly.

Vocational education and training

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — It is very difficult to answer a question which is not based on any fact. On the issue of percentage targets I have never commented that there are any percentage targets; the government has never commented on that. It has not been part of any policy. It is a dumb question. Then we get a question that asks me about how we are going to apply a concept that has never been discussed and has never been part of our agenda or anything. I answered that question — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — No, come on. It is a made-up proposition from over there. I answered in the best way that you can answer these to say that the process for contracts for private registered training organisations, which is what is at the base of this, has not changed and that they are already on the public website. In fact expressions of interest are in. We have had 255 applications — about the same as last year — and 50 have already been notified of how successful they have been. The only thing that has changed is that we have tightened up the contracts to make them more accountable for public use. There are no percentage targets; there never have been, and I have never commented on it.

Ordered that answer be considered next day on motion of Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan).

Written responses

Mr O’Donohue — On a point of order, President, I ask whether Mr Jennings will be providing me with a written response to my supplementary question about the cost of the implementation of the 20 recommendations from today’s report. The minister said that the Minister for Police would be the appropriate minister for that information and that he would be pleased to consult with him, and without putting words in his mouth, my recollection is that he would make that information available. I would appreciate it if it could be done in writing according to the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister indicated that he would be keen to provide that information at the earliest opportunity, and I think that was responsive to the question. The minister indicated that he did not have all the information available at this time and that his colleague the Minister for Police was scoping the cost ramifications of the matter that was raised in the house. The minister indicated he would be prepared to provide that information to the house and expects it to be publicly available when that information is available. What he has said at the moment is that it is not available. On that basis I thought the answer was responsive, and it would be not appropriate to ask the minister within a one-day or two-day time frame to provide a written response. Obviously it is a matter of concern to Mr O’Donohue, and I appreciate his genuine interest in these matters. I think it is one that he needs to monitor and perhaps come back to at an appropriate time.

Sitting suspended 1.01 p.m. until 2.05 p.m.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Sport and is in relation to the disappointing announcement that the new Ballarat basketball stadium bid for the latest round of funding from the National Stronger Regions Fund was unsuccessful, as have been the previous bids in the last five rounds under the federal Labor government. This is always a risk, and that is why the Victorian coalition government committed to fully fund the new stadium with \$15 million, but the Andrews government, with its normal, half-baked commitments, only partly funded the new basketball stadium with \$9 million in the hope that someone else would fund the shortfall.

Peter Eddy has been a long-term passionate advocate for the new stadium for over 30 years, and now Ballarat will only have a stadium of four indoor courts instead of having one at the national standard of six courts. Mr Eddy is fearful that the national tournaments will be lost to Melbourne and Werribee without additional funding, so I ask the minister if the state government will provide the additional funding for the two additional courts to complete the stadium to a national standard.

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. Many members of my community are concerned about the removal of remnant vegetation to accommodate new portable classrooms at the Montmorency Primary School. Requests for double-storey portable classrooms were submitted; however, these requests were rejected. As a result, up to seven indigenous trees will be removed, and a piece of adjoining bushland is also under threat. Will the minister now consider that double-storey portable classrooms should be installed at this school so as to minimise the impact on remnant vegetation and alleviate community concerns?

Western Victoria Region

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations, and it is in relation to the MV *Portland* vessel and its 38 Australian seafaring crew. The MV *Portland* has been carrying alumina from Alcoa’s Kwinana plant to its smelter in Portland for 25 years. In the past, both through its smelter and through the use of the MV *Portland*, Alcoa has supported local people for local jobs and maintained a good relationship with the Portland community. This latest decision to use foreign crew on a different ship to carry alumina is, however, extremely disappointing. It is a deliberate decision that raises a number of concerns about Alcoa’s approach and also about the federal government’s decision-making process. A community assembly has been present on the port for over three weeks now, supporting these workers and supporting local people for local jobs. My question to the minister is: what were the outcomes of her recent discussions with the federal government and Alcoa on this issue, and what will be the resolution of this important matter?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I refer to the Premier’s announcement

regarding the western distributor or, as some refer to it, the western diversion. Aside from questions surrounding the business plan — such as: is there one? — and the funding of this very mysterious project, very real concerns exist among residents of Melbourne's inner west as to the impact this road will have on their lives. Requests by concerned locals to Transurban for the release of consultation reports have been met with the response that it is up to the government to do that. Taking that advice on board, I ask: when will the minister publicly release these reports on consultation with local residents?

Eastern Victoria Region

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — My question today is to the Minister for Police. Retirement is the golden age in most people's lives. After many decades of being valued and contributing members of society we are then afforded the time to do the things we could not do when we were working. Superannuation or the pension is the source of income for the majority or retirees, and both of those tend to be fixed incomes. This obviously means that we need to be careful with our money. It is common practice for concessions to be made to pensioners; indeed a drivers licence has a pensioner concession. Strangely enough, shooters licences do not have a concession for retirees. This fact was raised by one of my constituents recently. My question is: will the minister implement a shooters licence concession for retired people and bring it into line with drivers licences and other licences?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I have raised on numerous occasions concerns from local residents and businesses about the increased congestion and associated health and safety aspects of increasing large truck movements to and from the port of Melbourne along Beach Road and Beaconsfield Parade. On 8 October the member for Albert Park, Mr Foley, wrote to one of those concerned residents saying:

As indicated we have this week launched the data-gathering material on identifying truck numbers and curfew management as we committed to in the election and ... we took the important step this week of installing the camera data collection material on Beaconsfield Pde/Marine Pde. You will see these cameras currently in place.

However, in mid-November the cameras along Beaconsfield Parade were removed from the original site of placement only a few weeks ago. When VicRoads was contacted and asked why they had been

removed or if they had been moved to another location, it was unable to provide an immediate answer.

My question is: why have the cameras been removed from the site in Beaconsfield Parade, and when will the data and findings from that monitoring process be made available, as Mr Foley suggested they would be?

Western Metropolitan Region

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Health. Last week the *Australian Atlas of Healthcare Variation* was released by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. It found an asthma rate of 531 per 100 000 children aged 3 to 19 in Maribyrnong, which was the highest in the state. This is 72 per cent higher than the national average and twice the rate in some eastern suburb locations. We know diesel fumes cause elevated rates of asthma in children, so we can now clearly link this finding to the massive numbers of diesel trucks in the inner west.

My question for the minister is: what will the government do about this? Will it extend school time curfews to Francis Street or finally commit to a ban on container trucks on local streets when new roads are built?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport and concerns the Hughesdale railway station. I was there just last week with Mr O'Donohue, and we were both very concerned about what we saw. The first issue is that there are no protective services officers (PSOs) on this railway station. The coalition government pledged to have PSOs on that station by December 2014, but a year later there are still none there. The safety risks as a consequence of this are obvious. The second issue is that there is no non-slip tread on the edges of the two platforms. Constituents have raised their concerns, and quite reasonably so, about slipping and injuring themselves as a result.

My question is: will the minister commit to fixing these glaring safety issues by funding the installation of non-slip tread on the edges of the two platforms at Hughesdale station as a matter of urgency, and can she confirm when PSOs will finally be deployed to the station?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is directed to my colleague in the other place, the Honourable John Eren, the Minister for Veterans, Minister for Sport and Minister for Tourism and Major Events. As most of us are aware, we have just recently celebrated Remembrance Day. Celebrating a day of remembrance, however, will never be enough to honour the sacrifice and noble service of every Australian man and woman who has died or suffered while protecting our country in wars and other armed conflicts. That is why it is important that support for the veterans community extends well beyond Remembrance Day to such an extent that state aid to ex-service men and women becomes a well-known fact of life in Victoria and in my electorate. My question is for the minister to update me on what is being done to support the veterans community in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

Northern Victoria Region

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and it is regarding the government's decision to remove a portable classroom from Malmsbury Primary School and relocate it to Brandon Park Primary School in metropolitan Melbourne. The Malmsbury Primary School community is understandably upset that this will place their students at a disadvantage. The school has an enrolment of 73 students, which has been stable for about five years. The portable is currently used as a performing arts and French classroom. These programs are greatly valued by the local community, and there is no real alternative space to deliver these programs on the school site. The portable also houses the school's data cabling, and the school has been told it will have to cover the cost of removing and installing the cabling elsewhere. To add insult to injury, the recipient school's November newsletter reveals that in addition to the portable, a new building is being built over the Christmas break. They also state they do not want their school to grow to become a larger school. I ask the minister to reverse this decision and allow the Malmsbury Primary School to keep the portable that is vital for the delivery of quality education for the children of Malmsbury.

LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Reference

Debate resumed.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — Before question time I had the opportunity briefly to commence my contribution to the debate on Mr Purcell's motion. I will not seek the house's indulgence for too much longer, but I was just partway through outlining some of the Andrews government's commitments to young drivers and their safety on our roads. In addition to the graduated licensing scheme, in 2014 an election commitment — and what is shaping up to be delivered over the course of the next 12 to 18 months — was made to deliver a \$146 million young driver safety package. It is aimed solely at reducing road trauma among young people, and it will cement Victoria as a the world leader on youth road safety.

The package is made up of five initiatives, including a road safety education complex, a practical safe driving program, continuation of the L2P learner driver mentor program, a reduced fee licence scheme that rewards safe drivers, and community grants, a communication fund and student forums.

At the moment we have a task force that is chaired by my parliamentary colleague the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, Shaun Leane. It has been set up to oversee the development of the initiatives by a group comprising VicRoads, the Transport Accident Commission (TAC), the Department of Education and Training, as well as Victoria Police. They are in the early stages of engagement with a range of industry experts to scope the initiatives to ensure that they are developed in line with evidence and best practice principles.

I will quickly outline in a bit more detail what those initiatives involve. We will have the road safety education complex. It is extremely exciting that we are looking at having a world-class facility that will feature evidence-based and best practice programs to extend to and engage young people in the community in the prevention of road trauma, consistent with the safe system approach. The \$80 million complex will be a global hub for road safety primarily targeted at senior level students and beginner drivers, but it will also be a resource and centre for experts from around the world to congregate and discuss developments in this space. The project's scope will be developed during the next 6 to 12 months and the opportunities for it are endless. The people there will be looking at driving simulators,

computer-based programs — the latest technology, which is probably beyond my remit of expertise. It is a very exciting development, and I am very much looking forward to seeing the details of that project as it starts to firm up.

With respect to the practical safe driving program, I happened to be with the then shadow Minister for Roads, now the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, before the election when Labor made this announcement at the Driver Education Centre of Australia in Shepparton. The response to it was immense. It is a practical safe driver education and training program designed predominantly for year 10 and equivalent students. It is not intended to be a defensive driving course but will be focused on a practical component as well as an education component. It is one of the things that I know Mr Leane is passionate about, and he is in the process of working out the specifics of the curriculum. We expect to begin delivery of that program in 2017. I know many parents, grandparents and young people themselves are very excited by the prospect of being able to get behind a wheel with expert advice and education behind them for those first steps as they enter their driving lives.

With respect to the L2P learner driver mentor program, Labor stepped in and made an election commitment that it would continue that program. Under the former government it was going to lapse because it made no commitment to continue it. L2P is integral to making sure that every young person has access to driving time on their Ls. It is a community care program that recruits volunteers to provide supervised training. It is particularly relevant for those kids whose parents may not have a car or a drivers licence or may work shift work and not have the time to help their kids get 120 hours of driving experience. It is a really worthwhile project.

Some of the community feedback I have had has not only been positive from the young people, but councils are also looking at the program and how they might integrate it to work as a community-based transport option. For example, perhaps an older person who needs to be taken to a medical appointment may be able to link in with this program. The program would not only benefit young people but also benefit the community as a whole. The feedback from volunteers is that this is one of those programs where a volunteer signs up and they are volunteers for a long time because it is very enjoyable. They form great relationships with the young people in their community, and young people get the opportunity to meet some older people in their community and learn from them, people with whom perhaps they would not otherwise have crossed paths.

We have education programs, TAC ads and things like that, not to mention the stories in the papers of crashes and fatalities. There is a lot out there to encourage drivers to keep safety at the front of their minds, and our free three-year licence scheme is a financial incentive which adds to that. This program is designed to reward the most responsible young drivers with free three-year licences if they complete the full four years on their red and green Ps with no traffic offences. It is an added incentive which aims to promote safe and responsible driving.

The community grants, communication fund and the student forums are basically something the TAC will be operating and extending in its current engagement programs. Six road safety forums will also be held in Melbourne and regional Victoria to encourage young people to talk directly to government — to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety — about their views and experiences and the challenges they may face on the road. The forums will ensure that we have bureaucrats and ministers who are fully aware of the perspective of young people when they are thinking about policies that affect young people. It is a great thing to involve more people in that development.

Specifically, coming back to Mr Purcell's motion, I echo the sentiments of other speakers before me today by saying this motion is very welcome. In relation to lowering the probationary driving age, it is well known that this policy position is not one that the Premier and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety are interested in entertaining at this point in time, but the sentiments of the motion are very welcome. Exploring the relationship between the probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas is something I am particularly interested in. Having grown up in the country, I am very aware of the issues around the lack of transport that may inhibit opportunities for training and employment, but equally not many of us country kids have escaped being touched by road trauma. I am a little bit conflicted when I discuss issues because I can see both sides. Road safety has to be paramount to other matters when we are talking about things like licensing.

I will be interested to see the outcomes of the proposed inquiry, and I am very supportive of the government's amendment put by Mr Leane earlier today that broadens the scope of Mr Purcell's motion. While the motion is very much focused on the probationary driving age and how that might impact on opening up employment, training and study opportunities for young people in rural and regional Victoria, it is important to note that in the event that there may not be a policy outcome, the committee is being given wide scope to

look at all kinds of solutions to problems, barriers and inhibitors for kids wanting to access education, training and employment that is not within close proximity to their home.

I am glad we have been able to broaden the scope of the reference. It will be a well-received inquiry. I heard Ms Patten say earlier in the debate that as a member of the committee she is excited to be looking at this reference. On that note, I thank Mr Purcell for his reference today and thank the other speakers on the motion. It has been a very worthy debate, and I indicate that the government is happy to support Mr Purcell's motion as amended.

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I start by thanking everyone who has contributed to the debate. It has been a very healthy debate with many issues covered. I will not take a long time in my summation of this motion. The idea for the motion started over 12 months ago when we were contacted before the last election by a number of constituents who were concerned about rural public transport and being able to get their 17-year-olds to work or to education or training. From that, we undertook to do something about it. You may have heard Dr Carling-Jenkins say that we developed an eight-point employment plan. One of the items in that plan was trying to do something about the driving age.

Members who are interested in what my next motion is likely to be should look at the Vote 1 Local Jobs website, where they will see the eight-point jobs plan. It is quite likely that some of those points will feature prominently in the next motion that I put up. They range from such things as payroll tax, government agencies and 'buy local' programs to relocating government businesses. No. 4 is lowering the driving age to 17, particularly for apprentices and those looking for work during daylight hours. The plan goes on to cover better funding for TAFEs; using the money from the grand prix to improve our road network; protecting agricultural land, which raises the coal seam gas issue that is topical as the report was handed down yesterday; and then supporting working parents by doing something with regard to child care, which ventures more into the federal area. That is where it started, and the issue developed from there.

When we did some research on the driving age, it became very evident that Victoria stood out as being different from the rest of Australia. It is the only state where 17-year-olds cannot get a probationary licence. As I mentioned earlier, I have friends who live on the border with South Australia and they have friends who are just a few kilometres over the border in South

Australia who can get their licence — a few years ago it was at age 16, now it is at 17. It is the same along the Murray River where, within a few kilometres, depending on which side of the river you reside, you can get your licence at 17. If you are in Victoria, you are in the only state where you will not get your licence until you are 18 years old. This then goes to the heart of whether we believe our 17-year-olds are any less responsible than the 17-year-olds in any other state. We do not believe that is the case. We believe that 17-year-olds in Victoria are just as responsible as those in the rest of Australia.

I support the amendment that the government has put up. It takes the proposed inquiry to the next level by saying that even if we do not get to a stage of reducing the driving age to 17, we will have a look at doing something about making certain that 17-year-olds do get to work, that they do get an opportunity to do their training at 17 and that their education can also fall under the same category.

My motion is not about changing the law. It is about ensuring that before we do anything else we make certain that we have all the data and information at hand so that we can make a decision based on fact rather than on guesswork. That is what this house does very well through the committee system, and I am sure this committee will do the work that is necessary to ensure that this house has the information it needs to make a decision for the state of Victoria.

The proposed inquiry will also look at the link between youth unemployment and public transport in regional Victoria, where public transport is limited if not non-existent. One of the big issues, and it is always a big issue, is the linking of two activities happening at once. Here it is trying to delink the drinking age from the driving age. I think most of us at period in our lives experienced it as a time when many things were happening, and being able to legally drink and legally drive at the same time was an issue. I have no doubt that it has caused many an accident in the state.

With international licensing, we do not live in a bubble. We need to look at other aspects of licensing, certainly throughout the Western world, to see what can be learnt from the experience and research that has been done in other parts of the world.

A common theme running through the debate today has been safety. It is one we need to take on board, and I believe the committee will take it into serious consideration. I do not think any of us would want the law changed if we thought it was going to affect a single person. From my research, as I said in my

opening remarks, it is clear that it is not age that causes the accidents, it is experience. The work that the committee does may highlight that even though we have some of the best predriving training, we need to look at it again as it could be the next area that we look to to reduce the road toll.

That is all I need to add at the moment. I thank everyone for their contributions. I commend the motion to the house.

Amendment agreed to.

Amended motion agreed to.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

Debate resumed from 11 November; motion of Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria):

That this house —

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

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

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Whilst I had a chance to contribute 4 or 5 minutes to this debate some four weeks ago, I really only had a small time before we had to finish the day's work and move on to statements on reports and papers, so I would like to quickly take people back to when it was that I put this motion on the notice paper. It was done in an environment where we had just had the AFL Grand Final, we had just had the most ridiculous comments from the Minister for Agriculture and it seemed as though she had no idea that a large part of the state have been gripped in an ever-worsening drought.

To a large degree in the six weeks since this motion was put on the notice paper it has done its job. Three weeks after the notice of motion we had the very first offerings by this government; it took three weeks to get the Premier out into regional Victoria, but nevertheless he got out into regional Victoria. He had a one-and-a-half-day trip on a Sunday afternoon and a

Monday, and he laid out a \$27 million support package that effectively acknowledged that the government had no answers and no idea what it wanted to do. However, it was put in a manner that was going to let the communities come up with the answers, and the packages that have been put together have a very strong resemblance to many of the packages that were put together during the millennium drought.

There is no doubt that this is an incredibly serious issue for many of the agricultural sectors, and it was born out of the alarming language that was used by the minister, who in the week leading up to the AFL Grand Final posted on Twitter the most inappropriate comments. I do not know whether it was hurtful or naive or whether it was just ignorant or whatever; however, it was appalling of her to be basking in delight at the upcoming hot, dry weather in the week leading up to the AFL Grand Final so that her Premier could have a rain-free public holiday when a large portion of those working in her industry were entering a second consecutive year of drought and a second consecutive year of crop failure that was putting them back into a financial mire that is going to be very difficult for them to get out of.

As it turned out, within the three weeks it took for the minister and the Premier to get out to regional Victoria they were able to come up with a few initiatives. The main language up until that stage had simply been this ridiculous little squabble that they were having with the federal government as to who was going to pay for the administration costs of setting up these concessional loans, which have the capacity to take very serious debt levels from farmers and offer them rates at significantly reduced rates. That has the potential to be of real assistance to the farming sector, and to think that they spent so long arguing about administration costs is quite distressing.

The language that was being used by the minister and government members led me, along with some of my colleagues, to get active in this space and to make sure that this government is aware of what is actually going on out there at the moment. We wish to ensure that the Minister for Agriculture gets connected and stays connected with her sector. This is the thing that people going through drought — people going through any hardship — want: they want their leaders to be engaged and connected.

Up until that stage we had a total disconnect. We had not even a mutter from this government in relation to anything to do with drought assistance or drought packages. The minister got to her feet today to reinforce some of the initiatives that came out of the \$27 million

that was announced some three weeks ago, on 15 and 16 November. I would like the minister, if she comes into the chamber again, to clarify what it was that she said today, because it sounded as though she was putting in place a range of initiatives that were going to enable recipients to spend \$10 million of the \$27 million. I do not know whether she was cocooning \$17 million for another area or whether her comments just did not come across in the way they were meant to. It certainly sounded as though she was only putting forward \$10 million of this package at the moment.

I suppose when you drill down into it, a Minister for Agriculture who is truly representative of her portfolio would be feeling every dry day that Mother Nature throws up and would be feeling every little bit of pain when she sees the yields that are coming in now because farmers have started stripping their crops months earlier than normal. We have seen many farmers turn their crops into hay for a return of approximately half, or perhaps a third, of what they would otherwise receive. You would have thought a minister who was truly engaged with her sector would have been riding every rise and fall with her people. However, that was simply, very obviously, just not the case.

We understand that it was incredibly hurtful to so many of these people that the minister who is supposedly supporting their industry seemed happy that they were going through this problem. I have no doubt that the minister had not one skerrick of nastiness at all and was not revelling in anyone's misfortune — that is not the insinuation at all. It was just a total disconnect that would lead a minister to go down this path.

The other aspect of it was the total lack of understanding that 2014 was such a sporadic year, and while we were not hit with a statewide drought I cannot ever recall in my time having a season like 2014 where farmers around the Mallee had a reasonable year but coming down into the Wimmera it was terrible. There were horrible yields for the cereal crops. If you went across towards the mid-west of the state it was horrible, with just terrible results. If you went across towards the middle and then around towards the east, some of those farms had some of the best crops that they have ever had, so there was an amazing concoction of different results and different yields in different areas that in a sense masked some of the hardship and financial ruin that beset many of the farmers in those areas that missed out for two years in a row. That is something that we need to be very aware of. Because it was not a millennium drought in a statewide area, that does not mean that those who got hit were not in a really bad way.

Looking at the situation — and unfortunately we had more than ample opportunity to look at how communities react in serious and prolonged drought throughout what is now being called the millennium drought — we understand that there are many thousands of farmers who have been hit with this drought, but only a few are going to put their hands up. We need governments that are truly engaged that will be able to connect with these people. The state needs personnel who are on the go now. The state needs people who are touching base with small country communities and personnel with the skills to engage with people who are going through hardship, because many of these people will simply fob them off and say, 'Yes, I'm going okay', when that is clearly not the case. We know that most farmers will put up a barrier because they do not want to be seen as some sort of failure in their profession. Those of us on the outside might have a very strong view that we understand that it has got nothing to do with your ability as a farmer when you are experiencing a year or two years of drought conditions; however, those who are experiencing it certainly do have that sense of failure that they feel is associated with them, and many of them are not prepared to put up their hand for assistance unless it is offered in a very professional manner.

There are a whole range of assistance packages that we could be looking at. It is not as though the government has to rewrite the book on this, as many of these opportunities were offered throughout the drought in the early part of the century. We simply have to go back and look at some of those provisions to see whether we can reignite some of those options. When it comes to school costs, we had a situation where principals were given discretionary funds, which they were able to use to assist struggling parents with school trips, excursions, uniforms and books so that the kids coming from those households were not overly disadvantaged. There were rebates on shire rates for those who were forced into financial difficulties, and that gave them the opportunity, if they happened to be located in an exceptional circumstances area, to apply for a range of rebates associated with shire rates. There was a whole range of other assistance as well.

The minister mentioned today that some money has been made available for community events, and they are very important. Certainly once the previous drought took hold in a prolonged way community events were seen to be a fantastic way of bringing those communities together and helping everybody to realise that they were in it together. The minister also mentioned the stock containment areas today, but there has been no mention of them in previous weeks. Some mention was made of \$2000 grants to enable farmers to

create some stock containment areas to minimise the areas in which stock can roam, but at this moment I am led to believe that there really is not any grant available for assistance in relation to stockfeed or water.

When it comes to water, one of the most pressing costs that a farmer faces and one of the more worrying accounts that come across a farmer's desk every year is the cost of water for his stock. During the previous drought there were fixed rates for the cost of water, and that is also something that the minister could engage with and look at putting provisions in place for. There are a whole range of things that can be done. The most important thing is that it seems now we have a government that at least seems to be listening. We now have a government that has put some money on the table. We now have a government that is prepared to use the word 'drought' and that seems to understand that many of our people —

Mr Barber — Are you prepared to use the words 'climate change'?

Mr DRUM — Absolutely. Why would you say something like that?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Through the Chair!

Mr DRUM — It is fine that the government is now starting to roll out some initiatives. It has been disappointing that it has needed to be kicked along in this way before being proactive with any of these initiatives. What the government needs to do now is to look at the major costs associated with the agricultural sector and at all the different costs and needs within the different sectors of the agricultural industry. As I am sure those associated with the agricultural sector will realise, there are many different sectors within the agricultural industry, and each of those sectors is going to require different types of assistance. At least now we have a government that seems to be in the space. Hopefully it can now become truly engaged with the VFF and its counselling services to work out how it is going to assist with these support packages.

I will conclude with those comments. The fact is that all along what we have needed is a government that would engage with these communities, and at the moment it seems to be making the right noises. Certainly for the first six to eight weeks, when the alarm bells were really ringing, there was absolutely nothing from this government. For the Premier to make a one-and-a-half-day trip to western Victoria and say, 'We're going to put a bucket of money on the table, and we'll leave it up to you to decide what sort of assistance

you need', is not really what I would call being engaged. What we really need is a government and a minister that are living in this space each and every day and truly understanding what it is that each of these sectors and regions needs.

As I said, these regions, industries and different parts of the agricultural sector are all going to have different needs. It is the government's role to come up with the policies that each of the sectors needs so that we can help each region and sector. What we have seen to date can be very clearly categorised as being way too little way too late.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — The Greens are pleased to support this motion relating to drought conditions in regional Victoria, acknowledging the serious drought that is continuing to develop in Victoria and calling on the government to develop urgent assistance packages for farmers and country communities.

Leaving aside the issue of an ill-considered tweet by the Minister for Agriculture, on which Mr Drum spent some time, what we have in front of us is a very serious problem requiring some very serious consideration by the house. I think it is appropriate that the house spend some time laying out the sorts of measures and considerations that we think government should be taking, because it will certainly not be the last time we are called upon to address the consequences of drought and in particular drought that has been introduced and enhanced by global warming.

Some of us have been here a little longer and know the many issues and challenges that were brought before the Parliament as a result of that long dry spell. Like me, Mr Drum would remember many debates about the proposed north-south pipeline, such as how it was to be built and where the water was to come from. There was the response to the bushfires royal commission that has seen many pieces of legislation go through this Parliament and so on and so forth right throughout that time when climate-related issues seemed to occupy an extraordinary amount of Parliament's attention.

Here we are again, with looming El Niño conditions and their impact being felt on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. Scientific and meteorological experts on both sides of the Pacific Ocean are watching for its next move very carefully. It would be a brave person who would predict that this will be a problem that will just disappear next year and that we will return to some sort of historical norm. The types of measures that therefore need to be put in place relate not just to an immediate crisis or to a drought of indeterminate length but to the

highly predictable impacts of global warming as they bring these sorts of conditions upon us more and more frequently and with greater and greater severity.

It is true that the Andrews government has announced a number of measures in the intervening time since the last Parliament debated this motion. On 15 November it announced a whole package of measures more in the realm of social support, such as mental health, first aid training, the state school relief program for out-of-pocket costs associated with keeping kids at school, kindergarten participation funds and camp, sports and excursion funds to ensure that, along with all the stresses put upon families by these conditions, kids do not feel like they are missing out on the activities that their fellow students are getting to do.

Along with that there were a number of measures around financial counselling and farm planning. Both the drought extension program and the rural financial counsellors program should be very useful assets for those farmers who have to not only deal with what is happening right now in this season but also start to plan for the next and the next and the next. With that there are a whole series of questions around their financial reserves — how much to invest; what loans do they need to make — because as the climate becomes more variable, less predictable and less friendly than it has been since our various rural industries were established, there is no doubt that greater resilience and financial buffers are going to be required.

As the need for greater buffers and working capital grows, there is an associated financing cost. That eventually starts to impact on underlying asset prices, the biggest asset being the value of the land itself. When those land values start to change you can get caught in a cleft stick between falling asset prices and the rising costs of finance that is secured over those assets. If that goes on for a few years, you start to see some quite dramatic changes to patterns of land use.

The announcement of that package got us so far; it got us through the beginning of what will inevitably turn into a crisis. The Victorian Farmers Federation seems to have welcomed it; I have met with its staff and discussed these issues with them. As an initial response I think it is a good start by the Minister for Agriculture, the Minister for Water and the Premier.

There are also some funds to employ drought-affected farmers and farm workers on environment projects. There is always a great need for more funds for environmental projects, to protect the productive areas of our land and also to protect the biodiversity that is intermingled with all those farms and communities. In

fact it has been a very successful exercise over the years to employ farmers in this way. It keeps them doing the thing they love doing, which is being outdoors and working to produce something that is quite tangible. Often it means they will be working with their friends in the community to do something for the community.

For that matter, Landcare groups, football clubs and other local groups that bring people together can be really valuable in these communities, so that people do not find themselves isolated, depressed or stuck at home with an uncertain future. I have seen for myself the way these social networks operate to keep people in good spirits and with a sense of connectedness to their friends, who may very well be going through the same things. They are an enormously valuable resource.

When it comes to what is traditionally thought of as drought assistance we are in a state of flux. The federal policies on drought assistance, which were reviewed by the Productivity Commission some years ago, have more or less been scrapped. There were arguments put forward that they did not operate ideally. Of course if someone is facing a future of long-term unviability, then drought assistance that keeps them in that unviable situation is not really a social good or necessarily good for those people. On that basis the old system of drought assistance was scrapped. Unfortunately it is not really clear what the new system consists of. There have been some ad hoc responses. The Victorian government has gone through the steps to get the necessary declarations in place. I think that was happening either side of the election last year, and certainly it has been happening this year. Whether that then leads to the sort of assistance communities believe is necessary is another matter.

We have to address the question of what measures are necessary when drought as traditionally thought of — natural variability but sometimes severe variability — starts to turn into something different, something more resembling the long-term trends we expect to see in Victoria associated with global warming and climate change. Then I think the flavour of Mr Drum's motion starts to change a little bit. We are talking not so much about drought assistance but about climate change adaptation, which can be a very different thing.

Members who want to contribute to this debate could draw on the resource of the previous government's *Victorian Climate Change Adaptation Plan*. It was a pretty good effort to get such a document out when the dominant ideology of that government seemed to be that global warming did not exist, but that if it did exist it was not going to do anything about it, and nor should the federal government. Various topics are covered in

that document, which as far as I understand is still the working draft of the climate change adaptation plan required under Victorian law. A number of these issues go directly to some of the challenges Mr Drum has highlighted for us: managing risks to public assets and services, managing risks to natural assets and natural resource-based industries, building disaster resilience and integrated emergency management, improving access to research and information for decision-making, supporting private sector adaptation and strengthening partnerships with local government and communities.

I have raised in this chamber on a number of occasions the fact that we are moving into a period of much less favourable climate conditions. It would have to be on top of the government's to-do list to develop comprehensive responses for this summer and all the seasons ahead. I do not intend to go through this document comprehensively, but in it we can see a number of the sorts of measures we are talking about. There is a case study about reaping the rewards of climate adaptation in relation to the Birchip Cropping Group, which some people seem to think is some sort of greenie plot. Actually it is just a group of farmers who are looking to the future and working with CSIRO on forecasting yields; managing climate, soil and water risk; making informed decisions about fertiliser and irrigation; and matching inputs with the yield potential of their crop. It is a software-based system using both historical climate data and also projections of the possible effects of climate change.

The first group of farmers to have been hit hard by this El Niño and global warming induced drought has been the cropping farmers, who have had to sow seeds and hope to get a healthy crop up, even producing grain, right when we have been hit hardest by the short, sharp, intense heatwave that I think initially led Mr Drum to frame and put forward his motion.

If we look at the isohyets — the rainfall bands — across a map of Victoria, what is interesting is how close together those lines are. It means that when there is a shift in rainfall averages, the area in which a certain crop or cropping system might be viable moves south very quickly. Once upon a time the Wimmera and the Mallee were seen as the home of cropping, but now you can drive down the Princes Highway and see them growing canola on the back of the Otways. There are great fields of yellow up there. The first time I saw it I thought, 'Gee, they've got a bit of a capeweed problem', because this was traditionally a dairy farming area where capeweed was a pasture weed. But in fact it has now turned into a viable area for grain growing, and that is due to the changing seasons and the movement of cropping systems all the way from the north of the

state down to the very south. Of course it was spud country as well. To see crops growing there is really quite a sight.

Further on in this document we can look at some of the things the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority has brought in. The entire catchment strategy for the 2012–18 period takes an approach that identifies the risk that climate change poses to various social and ecological systems and then sets out the actions and priorities it has identified. Let us hope that the funding has been made available to deliver on those priorities for Goulburn Broken and all the other catchment management authorities.

Of course this is not simply about drought and dryness. For these communities, and even our urban communities, heatwave is going to be a major issue to deal with. I shuddered last week when I saw the weather conditions in Adelaide. There were three stinking hot days interspersed with two warm nights. Based on past experience here in Australia, we know those are the conditions when a large number of vulnerable people will start to die because of the inability to get relief from the heat when there are hot days followed by hot nights. We know from the experience of the heatwave that preceded the Black Saturday tragedy here in Victoria that those exact conditions caused more premature deaths than the Black Saturday fires themselves. In fact we have had a parliamentary inquiry into that very issue.

Let us hope that the necessary measures are in place to protect vulnerable people, who are often old or isolated or have low incomes and live in poor quality housing stock. There are people whose finances are so tight that they cannot even afford to run air conditioners. We know of examples of people going around to each other's houses and sitting in the one house with an air conditioner going because they could not afford to run them individually, or even examples of people going to libraries or sitting around in shopping malls to get some relief from the heat. There should be proper systems in place in Victoria to organise all of that, as there now are in European countries, which also experience some severe global warming driven heatwaves.

In the section of the report that talks about supporting private sector adaptation it discusses building standards, design and so forth in relation to surviving bushfires and even the question of how we facilitate insurance markets. Here in Victoria we still put a tax on insurance, which leads to underinsurance, particularly of small businesses. Then at the end of every one of these natural disasters, be they fire, flood, heat or anything else, we find that people are underinsured and

funds have to be made available to get them back on their feet. Tax reform to actually get taxes off insurance would be one of the things that could meet the aims of this report. There is a whole section in the report on heatwaves, as I mentioned, and also on water allocations.

Moving on to the issue of irrigation farming, at the moment, at least in the Goulburn area, the water allocations have been, I think, somewhere around 75 to 80 per cent. We know from past droughts that even when allocations fell dramatically, production did not fall in the same way, which is to say farmers found more ways to be efficient with their water. But are any of those further efficiencies still to be had, or have we got most of those? Make no mistake: the scenario if we keep on heating the earth past 1 degree, 2 degrees or 3 degrees is the eventual destruction of the Murray-Darling Basin, which will experience in turn a higher rate of warming than those global averages.

Global averages is exactly what we are discussing in Paris right now. The science is very clear; in fact it is almost chilling that we are able to predict with such certainty the likely impacts of various concentrations of CO₂ and that world leaders can sit around and say, 'What do you reckon, guys? Do we want to heat the earth 1.5 degrees, 2.5 degrees? Take your pick, because whichever number you choose we'll dial back and get you the amount of polluting you can do'. The answer in all cases is not much. There is not much more polluting that we can afford to do if we are to stabilise the earth's temperature, let alone try to mitigate some of these impacts. It may be reasonably easy to model the impact of CO₂ concentrations on average global warming, but to then know the effects that that will have on each and every country, on each ecosystem, on each industry and on each community is much more difficult and much more uncertain. It really makes the price of taking action to reduce emissions quite small compared to some of the costs that we are facing associated with those risks.

There are questions of the infrastructure itself, be it in the area of transport, energy, water or the built environment. It will not be long before Mr Drum comes in here talking about the poor quality of the V/Line services, because with the heat we can expect there will be cancellations, delays and new, slow timetables brought in. All of that infrastructure needs to be made much more resilient to the new and much less friendly climate that we can expect in coming years.

This is a very timely motion by Mr Drum. It is important that members of the house turn their minds to all these issues. We have an important role to play here

in terms of representing the people and their interests in this, holding the government to account and of course understanding, when legislation to respond to the many issues that I have outlined comes before the house, that that is adequate legislation and that it is an adequate response.

While this motion simply calls on the government to take action, it is actually a very good use of the house's time to debate these matters, and I have been glad to take a small amount of time in contributing to the debate.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate on this motion given that I think I am the only practising farmer in this chamber and perhaps the only practising farmer in the Parliament. I stand to be corrected on that. Given that history, I have seen many droughts, perhaps the worst being the 1982–83 drought. For those who can remember that far back, the Ash Wednesday fires started in January 1983 about 10 kilometres from the property I now own at Deans Marsh and wound their way down to Lorne and along the coast.

I have very vivid memories of not only droughts but fires and have suffered through them all as the manager of a farming property over the last 30 years, so I can relate to what farmers face, specifically in the north but even on my own property, where we are now carting water and having to sell stock because we do not have enough grass. We are also buying in hay because we do not have enough moisture to stimulate pasture growth for the cattle. Even in the south people are finding it tough going to hold onto stock, and I guess we are lucky that our commodity prices are at a level where people are still able to sell and make reasonable profits through the stock markets, even in the grain growing areas where, although the grain is not worth harvesting, the cereals are of a quality to make hay. Despite a drop in price per tonnage of around \$150 to \$180 a tonne, farmers are still able to sell their cereal grains, not as grain but as hay fodder, for a reasonable price. We are lucky in that respect.

Countering that is the cost of feeding livestock and carting water. They are the two issues I want to refer to. I congratulate Mr Drum while he is in the chamber because I firmly believe his motion was the catalyst for the government having a better understanding of what is happening out there in regional Victoria. I remember tweeting the Minister for Agriculture, Ms Pulford — and I am glad to see she is in the chamber — on 2 October when she tweeted a brief description of the wonders of the Dunkeld pub and the beautiful steak she was enjoying at the time. I said to her in a retweet, 'The

most important thing for farmers right at this moment is moisture. We need rain now or we will all be stuffed'. I would like to think those comments might have made Ms Pulford somewhat more aware of what was happening out there in regional Victoria in relation to drought-like conditions.

The Bureau of Meteorology has a map which shows a very deep red area which is an indication of the worst rainfall records ever. It covers an area from almost the South Australian border, running from the north of Victoria through to central Victoria and down to the south. There is a small very deep red band that shows we have among the most deficient rainfall levels ever recorded in that particular area. It can be seen that the drought is severe and having a significant impact, and I remind the chamber that we are only in the second week of December. Traditionally we have to get through the months of February, March and April before we get any substantial autumn rain. This is just the start of what I see as being a real challenge for our agribusiness industry over the next few months.

Having said all that, though, and being somewhat critical of what is the slowness of the Andrews government to respond to pleas for help and assistance from the farming community, I congratulate Minister Pulford for the work she has done, along with the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, in providing a number of assistance packages to farmers who are facing severe hardship in the north. I briefly want to identify a few. Government, through its statutory authority water boards, has responded in relation to providing some water connections so that farmers can access water for stock. Stage 1 of the South West Loddon rural water supply project has been fast-tracked. There is about 40 kilometres of pipe in that project that has been fast-tracked to have water available for farmers to access. GWMWater has received \$1.1 million to connect three small areas around the water authority region to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline.

There is a call for 14 standpipes — and again I am glad to see Ms Pulford in the chamber at the moment, and I hope she is taking notes — which will require government support. The Northern Grampians have been calling for water cartage subsidies. As I said, I know about the cost of water because I am carting it myself at the moment. Carting a 3000-gallon, or 12 000-litre, tank just for a minimal distance is chewing up about \$800 every third day. That is \$2500 a week for a very small herd of cattle, so I can imagine what the cost must be for larger herds in the north, where water has to be carted larger distances.

I know the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is calling for some relief in shire rates. That has worked very well in the past. The coalition provided shire rate relief, and I am hopeful that through the monitoring process that is going on at the moment the government will see fit to support the VFF's calls for farm rate relief through a subsidy. I am pleased to see that the government has seen fit to provide kindergarten and school subsidies for students — \$125 for primary students and \$250 for secondary students. That is a very good assistance package for those families who have children at school.

I am also pleased to see social support for the 10 declared areas. That was very effective in previous droughts when we provided a similar type of assistance. I am equally pleased to see the mental health forums. I remember that at Warracknabeal we asked Jeff Kennett, who was then and is still the chair of beyondblue, to come and talk to those farmers and their families affected by the drought.

Suicides were going up at that time, and we were particularly concerned about the mental health of many of those families who were farming up in the areas that were very water deficient. The halls were packed everywhere that Jeff Kennett went. Those who assisted in the workshops and social activities — it was not all about workshopping but provided some entertainment relief to families as well — were well supported by their communities. I encourage Ms Pulford to provide some light relief to the families, particularly as we head into February and March, when I think the conditions will be even more challenging. Apart from the workshops I encourage her to provide some social relief as well as social support. All of those packages are good.

Stock containment is another area where nationally we looked at trying to provide some predrought assistance. Mr Barber is in the chamber, and that is good because I remember that when I was with the VFF we spent a lot of time in Canberra trying to encourage the federal government to put in a drought-ready plan where farmers could prepare for drought with a whole lot of programs, whether it was environmental stewardship, water conservation, fodder conservation or looking at grasses that were more hardy or drought-tolerant.

Sadly the industry slipped back to the old ways of not wanting to lose the interest subsidies that were attached to their outstanding loans — and possibly forward loans — through the drought period. I know the dairy industry was very reluctant to give way to the interest subsidies. But time has moved on, and now I see that the assistance package does not include interest

subsidies as such on loans — certainly concessional interest rates, but not full interest subsidies — and I think that is a good thing, because what we found was that those who had those subsidies long term were never going to be viable in the future. With the introduction of the rural counselling services, which provide financial advice to many of the farmers who are marginal and reliant on drought assistance interest subsidies, they have finally seen fit to exit the industry and new blood has come in with a different way of managing risk, and that is a good thing for the industry.

As Mr Barber said, having the catchment management authorities providing work for farmers who are suffering financial hardship through the drought is an excellent idea. It has worked well in the past, and I am pleased to see the government take on board the success of that program. Hopefully it will provide some additional money through the catchment management authorities to allow for those additional workers.

The additional \$270 000 for the Rural Financial Counselling Service has been well received by the farming community because it plays an important role particularly where there is financial hardship in the industry. It has been in place for a long time now. It is continually reviewed on its impact in providing financial advice that would not be able to be obtained commercially by farmers in a tight financial position, where bankers are perhaps not providing the sort of assistance you would expect from bankers. I have been through that process. When cash flow is tight and the drought looks like it is never ending, the banks are not always your best friend, so it is nice to have a third party that can provide some advice without the pressures of the banking institutions wanting you either to sell up or to reorganise your farm to a point where you feel the only way out is to exit. That is not always a good strategy. Sometimes it is, but not always.

There is not much more that can be said at this time. I am reluctant to go into climate change, as Mr Barber has done, because it invariably ends in tears, but I am pleased to see that the government has provided a package to our farmers particularly in the north that is very similar to past packages. I have identified areas that the government could perhaps look at in addition — that is, some sort of assistance for water access, water cartage and shire rates relief. Many farmers are facing bills of \$60 000 to \$70 000, which takes up about 10 per cent of their total operating budget. Ten years ago they would have been lucky for it to be 1 per cent or 2 per cent, but now it is a significant part of the costs, and to provide the sort of rates relief that the coalition did in the past in drought was a huge bonus for them, and I suspect the VFF sees

that as a priority for the government to commit to as the drought goes on.

I am interested to know from Ms Pulford — and she might like to provide the information — who sits on the Victorian Agricultural Advisory Committee. I suppose I could look it up on the website that she indicated this morning. I hope it is a cross-representation of industry, departments, stakeholders and financial institutions, as it has been in the past, where you get a good mix of all those involved in the industry providing advice to the minister on current and future climatic conditions, which will have an impact on farming businesses.

In summary, I congratulate Mr Drum for bringing forward the drought assistance motion. It has stimulated the government to take action and provide some financial packages. My hope is that we do not have the argy-bargy with the federal government in relation to declared areas for the concessional loans through the Rural Finance Corporation. I thought we had sold it; it must be still there in name, but perhaps not in building. Perhaps now the Bendigo Bank owns it. I hope the government continues to monitor and provide additional packages as required and as requested by the industry. February and March will be very challenging for Victorian farmers not only in the north but right across Victoria. Yields are down, water supply is down, fodder is down and it looks as if there will be a significant fire period ahead. I thank the house for the opportunity to contribute to the motion this afternoon.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I was furiously looking up the latest composition of the Victorian Agricultural Advisory Committee so I could answer Mr Ramsay's question. There is a small piece in the *Weekly Times* today which names the new members of the committee. It was established in part as a response to the new national drought policy framework, which Mr Ramsay spoke about in his contribution. It was due to finish, and we made the decision that it is an incredibly valuable committee and advisory group for the government. It is no longer a short-term committee; it is now a permanent advisory committee to the Victorian government. Mike Taylor, who has been the chair of the committee, is continuing as chair, and Alex Gartmann, Sue Brumby and Peter Tuohey are the continuing members of the committee. They are joined by four new members of the committee, who will make a fabulous contribution.

I had the opportunity to meet with the committee last week. It provides fabulous holistic advice that very much complements the advice I receive from the department but also takes into account the social and emotional conditions on the ground in communities that

are affected by drought. I congratulate the members of the committee on their appointment or reappointment and very much look forward to receiving their advice as we move through what will be a very difficult period.

I would like to take the opportunity today to provide a little further information to members about the types of support the Victorian government is providing to communities that are affected by drought. Firstly, I would indicate to members that there are 10 municipalities the government is providing this support to at the moment: Northern Grampians, West Wimmera, Hindmarsh, Buloke, Yarriambiack, Horsham, Central Goldfields, Loddon, Pyrenees and Gannawarra. As members will appreciate, this is a group of local council areas in the north-west and north-central parts of the state. This is where the impact of drought is most severe; however, this is not a fixed and firm list. This is a list of a group of communities and councils representing a point in time. We are monitoring conditions very closely, and conditions are changing quickly.

Our initial response to drought, which was announced as part of a visit to a number of these communities by me, by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, Ms Neville and by the Premier on 15 and 16 November, represents the government's first response and an escalation from a stage 1 response to a stage 2 response. I would encourage members to familiarise themselves with the national drought policy reforms that have occurred. Again Mr Ramsay spoke in some detail and from a position of considerable firsthand experience about the discussions that occurred over a number of years preceding my time in this role.

The Victorian government adopted the national drought policy framework in mid-2014. This has presented some challenges in terms of the way the community understands how we respond to drought and what the triggers are. People are still waiting for a declaration as such, but that is among things that ceased to be as a result of that policy change. In essence a stage 1 response is close watching and monitoring, stage 2 is an escalation in support and stage 3 is obviously a greater level of support and a further escalation in response to conditions, and there are a number of triggers for stepping from one stage to the next, which is what the initial drought response represents.

I thank members for their comments about the government's initial response, and I will briefly recap and provide some further advice about eligibility for each of the initiatives. This information is on the department's website, and I would encourage members to share this far and wide, particularly those who

represent communities affected or who represent the many communities in the areas that are experiencing uncertainty around dry conditions — not as acutely as in the north-west and north-central parts of the state, but it is certainly very dry compared to an average year nonetheless.

With respect to the stock containment areas initiative, those eligible are farmers with demonstrated ownership of property in the Wimmera, Mallee, North Central and Goulburn Broken catchment management authority (CMA) regions. There have been 60 expressions of interest to date, and the property assessments are commencing today. The CMA drought employment program will be rolled out in the Wimmera, Mallee, North Central and Goulburn Broken CMA regions. The Rural Financial Counselling Service has been provided with a boost. This is something we fund in partnership with the commonwealth government. We will continue to monitor very closely the pressure that service is under. At the moment the trigger point for additional resources is measured not by the number of people or where they are but by how long people need to wait if they are seeking assistance. Members will not be in any way surprised to learn that there is a high demand for that service. The additional rural financial counsellors who will be available as a result of the funding boost will, therefore, be very busy from the first moment, I am sure.

Drought extension services offered by the department are continuing. There have been a great many information sessions hosted where farmers affected by drought are able to access information and departmental expertise to help inform decisions they need to make around their own businesses. I fear that I may have lost count of the number of these, but it is certainly well above 20. They are occurring in affected communities, and again I would encourage members to make themselves familiar with the program as it continues to be rolled out. The National Centre for Farmer Health, of course, does a particularly fabulous job in supporting the health of farmers across Victoria. We were very pleased to provide funding to restore the centre to its full and former glory in our first budget. Whilst funding for the centre was in the budget rather than in the initial drought response package, the way the centre works and operates is that its efforts can be directed to particular areas of acute need, and I am sure everybody would support the idea that its particular focus at the moment be around the communities that are most in stress. The centre plays a great role in promoting mental and physical health messages for farmers.

Applications can be made for the back-to-school aspects of the package. In relation to support for

kindergarten participation in drought-affected communities, I have been surprised by just how important this has been and also the community response to it. I was at a meeting in Wedderburn with the Victorian Farmers Federation — there were many of the federation's members, 70 or 80 people, in the room — as we were preparing our initial response. This was certainly not the only meeting of its kind that I attended, but it was a really important opportunity for me to hear firsthand from people about what they thought would be the most useful interventions from government, particularly in the early stage response.

Again, we are talking about farmers who have experienced extraordinary transition and who are visited by people from around the world to see the extraordinary yields that they get relative to rainfall, particularly in the north-west of the state. What many people said to me was that our effort needs to be around supporting their communities as much as it is about supporting them directly, and support for kindergartens was a recurring theme in the discussions.

I was more than delighted when the Minister for Families and Children, Jenny Mikakos, announced yesterday some additional assistance for kindergartens with very low enrolments. This was in direct response to conversations that the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, Lisa Neville, and I have been having in drought-affected communities and conversations we have been having with Minister Mikakos around the fundraising requirement for very small cohorts of kindergarten children, their families and their communities. This is a very welcome addition indeed, because of course investing in young people in these communities is one of the most important things that we can do.

In regard to the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund in the 10 local government areas that I mentioned at the beginning of my contribution, the existing eligibility for access to the funding is being extended to drought-impacted families — so, not requiring the means-tested concession card, which is the usual eligibility — to ensure that young people in these communities are able to fully participate in school life.

Small business workshops are being held, and there is some funding support available to the 10 affected local councils for the provision of that very important service that pulls all of these bits and pieces together and provides a bit of a one-stop shop for people to access the information that they need. It is really important that we all work together to ensure that people have access to the information they need, and right now access to the kind of support that enables good business

decision-making and support for communities has been the focus of our efforts. But, as I indicated, this is an initial response to a set of conditions that are changing all the time.

Part of the \$27 million was a \$10 million drought support fund that is yet to be allocated, but we are having discussions, and last week I had discussions with the Victorian Agricultural Advisory Committee and had a number of other conversations with affected communities about what is the best use of this resource. Many and varied suggestions have been made, which I am happy to share. I know Mr Ramsay offered a few suggestions as well. People have talked about the need for recreational water to, for example, keep the footy oval playing surfaces in the kind of condition that will enable that important community activity to continue. People have talked to me about the need for access to occasional child care so they can participate in off-farm work to generate additional income. We will continue those discussions with communities about what is the best use of those funds.

Of course in the many discussions that the Premier, the water minister and I have had with people, there has been talk around notions of municipal rate subsidies and additional CMA employment programs. Fortunately and unfortunately, I suppose, we have at hand a lot of knowledge about what works and a lot of experience about what is effective. There are so many good ideas. We will continue to assess these conditions, monitor them closely and support these communities as required as we go forward.

I would like just to add a couple of comments about the conversations that we have with the federal government around these issues as well and advise the house that the national drought response framework policy that was agreed between the commonwealth and the states in the lead-up to and during 2014 clearly delineates what is federal government responsibility, what is state government responsibility and areas of shared responsibility. It is an important framework. The federal government is providing the farm household allowance. It has made available concessional loans which, through us, Rural Finance is administering, and additional support to a rural financial counselling service. We have had some good discussions with the commonwealth about our needs, and I certainly look forward to continued dialogue with the commonwealth about this.

I appreciate that the situation that New South Wales and Queensland farmers have experienced is different from that being experienced by Victorian farmers and indeed those in South Australia now, but I would very

much welcome the federal government's interest and investment in making available some of the kinds of initiatives that it has been able to provide to New South Wales and Queensland to Victoria. That is a conversation we will continue to have with the federal government, but there has been significant assistance through drought employment program funding for other states.

I welcome the opportunity to provide the house with an update. I encourage members to continue to watch closely and to provide support to these communities in whatever way they can. I will respond quickly to Mr Ramsay's request that we also give some thought to events funding. I indicate by way of response that as part of the package some small grants have been provided for events funding to the three most profoundly affected municipalities.

We were also able, through the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, to fast-track a number of projects in Buloke, Loddon Mallee and Yarriambiack that were announced over the course of the few days that I was in the region with the Premier and the water minister. I indicate to the house that there were a number of project grants totalling \$1 million, including the Foletti Park upgrade; for Donald, the Donald archives museum; the Buloke major towns central business precinct master plan; and a really important project, which may be of interest to members, for advancing intensive agricultural opportunities in the Loddon Mallee region.

We have had a lot of interest from the community this year about intensive agriculture, its impact on communities and the pressure that community campaigns can put on our growing agricultural industries. The councils of Buloke, Loddon, Gannawarra, Central Goldfields, Campaspe and Greater Bendigo are working together to facilitate the identification of areas that would be suitable for broiler sheds and other intensive agricultural industries. That project is now on in earnest. There is community events funding for each of Buloke, Loddon and Yarriambiack.

There is a lovely \$400 000 project at Bridgewater, to which the government is contributing \$300 000. It will facilitate a lovely link between the main street in Bridgewater and the Loddon River. In Yarriambiack there is a project to upgrade a number of the shire's walking tracks, streetscapes and a traveller's rest in Minyip — —

Ms Crozier — On a point of order, Acting President, I am just referring the minister to the motion that has been put to the house by Mr Drum about

drought conditions. I am just wondering what the minister's contribution has to do with the very pertinent points that Mr Drum has made. I wonder if you would draw her back to the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! It is not a point of order, but I was a little bit confused myself. I am not sure if this is a regional development statement or — —

Ms PULFORD — On the point of order, Acting President, it is integrally related to the topic and directly in response. Shall I continue?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I have ruled that it is not a point of order. I ask the minister to refer back to the motion about drought and drought assistance.

Ms PULFORD — What I was doing, just to assist Ms Crozier, who may need a map, was outlining the fast-tracked — —

Ms Crozier interjected.

Ms PULFORD — I indicate to Ms Crozier that I was explaining what we were doing, in direct response to Mr Ramsay's request for the government to think about events funding, with the three most profoundly impacted communities. I was explaining the fast-tracked regional development grants that are part of the \$27 million package. If that is a bit tricky, that is not my fault.

Ms Crozier — On a point of order, Acting President, the minister is debating across the chamber with me. Do you want me to read out Mr Drum's motion again?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! No, thank you. I know the motion. That is not a point of order. If Ms Pulford is not raising a point of order, is she finishing her contribution in relation to the drought motion?

Ms PULFORD — Yes. Just briefly, before I finish, the projects that were fast-tracked as part of the drought response in the three most profoundly affected municipalities include the Minyip and Brim streetscape, the Woomelang shopping precinct upgrade, the Wheatlands Warracknabeal Agriculture Machinery Museum upgrade and the business case for the Wimmera weather radar, and I will talk briefly about the last project.

The Wimmera weather radar problem has existed for a long time, and the Wimmera Development Association

is absolutely to be congratulated on its advocacy on this project. A number of years ago I raised in the house a matter for the then Premier, Mr Baillieu, where I sought his government's assistance to advocate to the commonwealth government about the need for this weather radar to be pushed up the project list. These are things that are funded by the Bureau of Meteorology, and in the hierarchy of allocating resources it does not consider the economic benefits that can flow from weather radar towers. It is very much a lower order consideration for the Bureau of Meteorology.

Ms Crozier — How are the wi-fi towers going?

Ms PULFORD — They are coming along very well. I thought you wanted me to stick to the motion, but we can talk about trains if you like.

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

Ms PULFORD — The government's investment and partnership with Telstra and the federal government will also do a great deal to eliminate black spots in 108 locations across regional Victoria. That project is well underway, but Ms Crozier seems keen to drag me off the topic. The Wimmera weather radar business case will now be completed by the end of the year. The West Australia government has taken an innovative approach to working with the commonwealth government in funding this project. Normally state governments do not get into weather radar infrastructure, so I look forward to that business case because I would very much like to explore anything that we can do, and indeed what the federal government can do, to provide some relief to the radar information gap that is occurring, with nothing between Mildura and Mount Gambier.

The area most profoundly affected by drought corresponds with the area in this information blackout. This information is, of course, incredibly important, particularly for our grain farmers in the north-west of the state. As part of the drought package we were able to fast-track a number of important regional projects through the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, because it is very hard to see us supporting our rural and drought-affected communities with regional development in isolation, and to do so would be absurd.

I thank members for their contributions to the debate on the motion. I thank members for their words of support to our farming communities and those who are most profoundly affected. I look forward to an ongoing dialogue with all members in the house about the kinds of things they think will be good additions for us to

consider, perhaps as part of that \$10 million to be allocated. I am acutely aware that the intense period of pressure for these communities is yet to come. What I have been saying to those communities in frequent visits to the region is that we understand, we are working closely with their communities, we will be with them for the duration and we will continue to provide an appropriate response as required. I welcome the opportunity to provide those updates on the government's initial response to drought in Victoria.

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — I am very pleased to be able to make my contribution to the debate on Mr Drum's motion on drought conditions in regional Victoria. It is particularly pertinent to make the point that it was after Mr Drum's motion was proposed to the house that we saw the government make some movement on its response to what is a significant drought affecting regional Victoria. I was also pleased to hear that the Acting President may have made a contribution by way of a tweet to draw the government's attention to the drought conditions we are seeing in regional Victoria. It is good to see the coalition holding the government to account to ensure that it understands that the state does extend past the Western Ring Road and that there are parts of the state that do need to be looked after, particularly in times of dry conditions.

It is important to note that the season started out quite well. I recall being in Wycheproof earlier this year and talking to some farmers up that way who were positive about the outlook because there was some early rain and it looked like it may have been a good season, but unfortunately the rain stopped. There were no further rains, and their crops and the like did not progress in the way they may have liked. Since those early rains, dry conditions have persisted in the Mallee and most of the Wimmera practically all season. In parts of the Western District they were tracking well until early October, when we saw high temperatures, and again the lack of rainfall had a significant impact. Frost was also a major problem, with the El Niño bringing worse and more frequent frosts, which are always of concern to farmers.

The timing of the recent rain was beneficial for some Western District farmers as well as dairy, cattle and sheep farmers, but it came too late for the Mallee, most of the Wimmera and parts of the Western District. As we have heard, many of the crops were cut for hay, but as they were drying in the paddocks many were unfortunately ruined by rain. The harvest is underway in the Mallee and northern Wimmera. Rain did little more than delay the harvest, but it did cause more damage to the crops as well. I have heard from farmers that the yields are down on average years by between

20 per cent and 70 per cent, depending on where you may be in regional Victoria. That is going to have a significant impact on farmers and what is going to be coming out of the crops.

Both Mr Drum and Mr Ramsay have highlighted that a response to the drought conditions in regional Victoria over the last little while was required. The slowness of the response from the government was of concern when these conditions were evident to coalition members who represent the regional areas in Victoria and understand the damage that drought conditions can cause the community. It is important for us to understand that drought conditions do not just affect the financial livelihood of regional communities. They can have a huge effect on the physical and mental welfare of those in regional Victoria and also have a significant impact on communities as a whole.

Our farming communities are very resilient. They have a great capacity to deal with conditions such as drought that create difficult situations in regional Victoria. However, it is incredibly important that the government recognises the concerns of these communities and responds to them well. I was pleased that some support was announced by the government in a flurry of media releases on Sunday, 15 November, even if it was belated. Some of the support packages were aimed at supporting regional communities — —

Ms Pulford interjected.

Mr MORRIS — Perhaps I get my emails a bit later than everyone else, Minister Pulford. I was pleased to see that some of the support packages would deliver mental health first aid training across 10 identified local government areas to ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of those who are affected by the drought are addressed. We are beginning to recognise more and more that those in regional communities represent over the odds in terms of issues relating to mental health and mental wellbeing, and that is particularly prevalent during difficult times such as droughts, so I was pleased to see that being addressed in the packages.

I listened to Mr Ramsay's contribution with particular interest. The points he made in regard to water cartage support and council rates relief are two sensible responses to the drought that I encourage the government to take note of. Despite the fact that there have been some support packages made available, there is more that the government can do to ensure that the needs of regional communities are addressed throughout this period of drought.

It is important to understand that whilst the season looked as if it would turn out well — and I think those who were fortunate enough to spend a bit of time in the great city of Ballarat would recognise that we had quite a cold winter — unfortunately it was not a wet winter. People who live in the metropolitan parts of Victoria may have thought that as a result of having a cold winter the farmers may have been doing okay, but that has not been the case. The rainfall has been well below average — 50 per cent lower than the average in many parts of Victoria — and that places a significant strain on regional communities.

In closing, I commend Mr Drum on bringing this motion to the house. I was pleased to see that this motion prompted action from the government, which was too slow in responding to the needs of our drought-affected regional communities. I also commend my fellow member for Western Victoria Region for tweeting the minister and ensuring that she understands the concerns that regional Victoria has about the drought conditions that it finds itself in.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the motion moved by Mr Drum and congratulate him on bringing it before the house. It is a very important motion for communities in the north of the state, in our electorate, that are experiencing drought conditions. I also congratulate the government on acknowledging that there is a drought. This is an improvement on the Bracks years, when in 2002 former Premier Steve Bracks would not say the d-word. In fact the government kept referring to 'dry conditions'. There is a famous photograph of Steve Bracks visiting the north of the state, where he picked up some earth, which just filtered through his fingers, and said, 'We are obviously in the midst of dry conditions', when those of us in the north of the state knew we were well and truly in the grip of drought — and we are back there. Not long after the last drought, the millennium drought, which was so devastating to our community, our community is back in drought.

The drought package that the government announced the other day was a welcome first step, but it needs to go much further. As the minister herself acknowledged today, that package is largely for only 10 local government areas, and there are lots of other areas that are hurting. I also put on the record that not all of the money in the package is new money. That was particularly obvious when you looked at the \$5.8 million for the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which will ensure that kids in drought-affected regions do not miss out on these important educational experiences. People will know that money comes out of a government election commitment, so it is not new

money for those areas; it is money that those areas were going to receive anyway.

The same is largely true of the \$960 000 to support children's participation in kindergarten. The people in the areas covered by this drought package earn some of the lowest average incomes in the state. Many of the children in these areas already qualify for kindergarten fee relief, which is what that \$960 000 provides. A lot of that money would have been spent in these areas anyway.

In her contribution, the minister also congratulated Jenny Mikakos, the Minister for Families and Children, on the small rural kindergarten grants. They are not new either. I wrote this policy when we were in opposition in 2010 and worked very closely with a number of small rural kindergartens on this policy because they were really hurting back then. Many of these kindergartens were having to go out and raise up to \$50 000 just to cover the cost of employing their teachers. They were appealing to Maxine Morand and to John Brumby for some assistance, and that was falling on deaf ears under Labor. Labor was happy for these kindergartens to close down, and as we can see from the way that the implementation of the new ratios is going, Labor is probably still happy for these kindergartens to close down.

This was a policy I developed with a number of small rural kindergartens, and I would like to particularly acknowledge Amanda Kumnick from Willaura and District Kindergarten, who was a great advocate for these grants. I worked with Amanda and her committee and went to a fundraiser that the kindergarten had on 21 November 2010. It was the Sunday before the election, and I made the announcement that a Liberal government, if elected, would provide up to \$20 000 each year for these small rural kindergartens. It was well received. We had a budget for that. Originally it was only supposed to go for four years, but I locked that budget in so that it would be ongoing. Jenny Mikakos has been the recipient of the work that I did to get the money out of Treasury to lock those grants in as an ongoing support for small rural kindergartens.

There was always excess in that budget, so there were always opportunities to increase the amount. We increased the amount from \$20 000 to \$25 000, but I note that with the announcement today that those grants will now go to \$33 000 there has also been a tightening of the criteria. We have now gone from small rural kindergartens, which are kindergartens with a number of enrolments at 14 children or less, to very small rural kindergartens, with enrolments of 8 children or less, so those kindergartens that have 9 to 14 students will not

qualify for this announcement made by Jenny Mikakos today.

I would also like to talk a little bit about the other areas in our state that are hurting, and why this government needs to support those. I thank the Minister for Agriculture and also the shadow minister, who both accepted my invitations to visit horticulturalists in the Goulburn Valley last week. We have had two severe hailstorm events that came within a month of one another, in October and November. They wiped out around 90 per cent of the stone fruit in the orchards that were affected. Around 50 per cent of the apples and 30 per cent of the pears have also been damaged. This has been devastating for these growers.

These growers had invested in getting their crops to the point of harvest. In fact the stone fruit was only about a week away from harvest when it was destroyed by the second hail event. They not only had invested in getting these crops to harvest stage but also, between the two hail events, had gone through and thinned off the damaged fruit to leave the good fruit there for the harvest. Unfortunately the good fruit then got destroyed by the second hail event. That was an additional cost; it was very expensive to thin the fruit. Then they just had to knock what was left off, and we stood amongst rotting apricots when we talked to the orchardists last week.

The orchardists talked about the impact that is having on them and their families. They had, as I said, invested in getting those crops to that stage. They now have no income coming in next year, but they need to invest in another crop, so they will be two years behind by the time they have invested in this year's crop and next year's crop, without any income next year. This makes it very difficult for them.

Household assistance, as the minister pointed out, is available to them. They are all pretty proud, but we are encouraging them all to go and get that household assistance, which is provided by the federal government, to ensure that they can put food on the table. They talked about the other types of assistance that they need from government, including things like local government rates subsidies and some investment from the government to assist them in putting up hail netting to prevent the loss of future crops.

Our dairy farmers are also suffering significantly in the irrigation area. The price of temporary water is hovering between \$250 and \$300 a megalitre, and the dairy farmers just cannot make money at that price for water. It is cruel that when the Bracks government unbundled land and water, many of the banks

foreclosed on people's water. We used to have the visuals of banks foreclosing on farms and turfing people off the farm; on *A Current Affair* nearly every night there was a story about a farmer being turfed off his property. The banks got clever about it and said, once water and land were unbundled, 'Well, you can keep your land, but we want your water. Sell your water and pay off your debt'. That left them on unproductive farms or on farms where they relied on the temporary water market. At the time, the temporary water market was about \$40 a megalitre. It is now at, as I said, up to \$300 a megalitre, and dairy farmers just cannot make money at that price.

We have a lot of particularly young dairy farmers who have invested in farms. These are young people who want to work and want to work hard. They do not want to sit at home and get the dole, but they would actually be making more money if they were just sitting at home on the couch and collecting the dole, rather than trying to run productive farms. We need to see some assistance not only for farmers in the dryland farming areas but also for those in the irrigation areas who are suffering from the drought or for many other reasons, such as having lost their crops from hail. In the case of dairy farmers, it is a drought of a different kind — a drought of money to purchase water. Whilst they can purchase water, it is just out of their reach. We need to see a lot more assistance from this government.

I would like to finish with a story that I heard from a farmer when I was campaigning in 2002, before I was elected to Parliament. It was at the time when the drought was really taking hold in northern Victoria, and I went to the Elmore Field Days and listened to a farmer being interviewed. He talked about the effect of the drought on their families. He said, 'I feel very sorry for people who lose their job — people like the Ansett workers — but the reality is, if you work at Ansett and you lose your job because the business has gone broke and closed down, you lose a job and that is it'. He went on to say that people in this position might go onto government assistance for a little while until they find another job, but they continue to live in their home and everything goes on.

But farmers suffering in drought conditions or, as at the moment, horticulturists who have lost their crops and will not have any income for the next 12 months, still have their job to do, but there is no income coming in. Often they cannot apply for household assistance — they certainly could not back in 2002; there was no household assistance for them. They still have the job, but they have no income coming in. As well, if they do lose their job, they actually lose their farm. For many of them that means losing the family home, the property

that has been in their family for generations; they are the ones who lose it. There is so much more at stake for those farming families. They will not only be out of work, but they will lose their family heritage and family properties. This is why we see so much depression in country Victoria and such a high rate of suicide amongst our farmers, and it is absolutely cruel.

Just touching on suicide, I will tell another story of the last drought. Sharman Stone, the federal member for Murray, was living across the road from me at that time. Each night either I would pop across to Sharman's or she would come over to my place, and we would talk about what had happened during the day, who had called into the office and what sorts of issues they had called in on. One night my dad was there when we were talking about the number of farmers who had rung in that day and threatened suicide. My dad said to me, 'What do you do when someone rings in and threatens that?'. We said we have to take it seriously, even if we think they are only threatening. We would ring one of the financial counsellors or the rural counsellors and send them out to do a cold call at the farm to assess the situation and find out what assistance could be given to that farmer. My dad then said, 'But who counsels the two of you?', and our answer was, 'No-one; that's why we talk to each other'.

As country members of Parliament we cope with so much more than many of our city counterparts. During that same drought I had the member for Brighton in the Assembly, Louise Asher, visit, and we talked to a whole range of women in Rochester. They had not had an irrigation allocation for a number of years. At that meeting tears were flowing freely, so much so that I had to go across to the supermarket and buy boxes of tissues. After the meeting Louise said to me, 'We don't have things like this in our electorates'. That is right; metropolitan MPs do not have things like that in their electorates. If large companies such as Ansett or Ford close down, governments rush from everywhere to provide assistance, but in the country we not only cope with drought; we cope with floods and bushfires and a whole range of natural disasters that impact on our communities and the livelihoods of many of the people in our communities. They are absolutely devastating, and that is why this government needs to step up and offer more drought assistance to those communities that are suffering in country Victoria at the moment.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I acknowledge Mr Drum's motion today and recognise that it is a very important issue for rural and regional people. Recently I had the pleasure of going to Swan Hill and Echuca, and through Cohuna, Gunbower and Terang in the electorate of the member for Murray Plains. I noticed

the shocking reality of the lack of water throughout that land. I rode a pushbike as part of a team event, and as I slowly pedalled along my way through that district there was dirt and dry grass, the land was destocked of animals with a few sheep from time to time and withering thistles and saltbush. There was no grass. The only green parts that one could see was the land under irrigation, and even those patches were few and far between. It was a shocking reality for me to see that area and how the farms, towns and small businesses have to cope in that environment. It is quite soul destroying to be in that space, and I acknowledge those people — and I only saw a very small part of that situation.

Water is such a vital commodity. Next to people and land, it is the most important commodity in our state. In terms of a dairying industry in my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region, we are having what could be called a green drought. The land looks good, there is still green grass and many of the farmers in Gippsland have produced their silage and are in the process of baling hay, but there is no water content left in the ground and no major grass regrowth coming through for pasture production or for milk production in cows. The farmers' dam reserves are diminishing, and it is quite a serious situation.

I have been speaking with people in South Gippsland in and around Yanakie, Fish Creek and Waratah Bay, and they have identified to me that this October the rainfall was down 50 per cent compared to last year, and last year was a below-average season. This points to hardship amongst the dryland dairy farming community. With respect to wetland farming, recently I have been speaking with people in and around the Macalister irrigation district (MID). I have visited the farms, and the farmers commented that they view water as liquid gold, not because it makes them a fortune but because it represents such an important asset to their livelihood.

This is why it is important that this Labor government come to the table and support the MID 2030 Southern Tinamba pipeline modernisation, which we affectionately call phase 1B of the project. In the past both the state coalition government and the irrigators themselves developed phase 1A, and both supported it with \$16 million coming to the table for its completion. At the moment phase 1B requires \$60 million over five years, with the federal government to provide \$20 million, stakeholders another \$20 million and the state government \$20 million to complete the project. It needs to do this unconditionally, with no strings attached.

The next phase of the MID 2030 will enable increased water efficiency and therefore increased production. It will unlock parts of this district so that they have the full potential to reliably deliver water to the ground and grass. This is an area that produces significant dairy and also crops and vegetables, and this can be expanded. It will be a modern, efficient and responsive system. Within five years the project is projected to save and reinvest almost 10 gigalitres of water. There will be less run-off into our streams and rivers from dairies and farms. This is a major environmental saving and will reduce the amount of contaminants. It is going to be far more efficient. It will also mean more water is available for environmental flows from the Lake Glenmaggie Weir.

Recently the Deputy Prime Minister, Warren Truss, visited the area in Gippsland. A federal white paper has identified the MID as a priority project. The federal coalition government will put \$500 million on the table for the national water infrastructure fund to develop water assets, including dams. Recently in the *Gippsland Times* the Victorian Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water reaffirmed Labor's commitment to the project by pledging \$20 million but only when the port of Melbourne lease legislation goes through the Parliament. I find it very disappointing that this government is talking about linking the MID to the sale of the port of Melbourne. My point is that the MID infrastructure project in the past was bipartisan and should still come with no strings attached. Mr Truss said the federal government is now negotiating with the states on how this funding should be allocated and that clearly, if Victoria is interested in this project, there is real potential to be included in that funding program.

By their very nature farming people are fighters; they are resilient and the dairy industry is a proactive one. Farming groups are sharing their solutions to tough conditions. Leading bodies Dairy Australia and GippsDairy have organised Tactics for Dry Times workshops, which have been held across Gippsland to provide ideas and resources to help farmers through these tough times. These workshops are free and highlight areas such as summer feeding plans, feed options and cost; grazing and protecting pastures; farm water supply; young stock feeding strategies; animal health; working with farm finances and debt; and government farmer assistance. There is a workshop coming up in Maffra on 15 December. Workshops have already been held in Inverloch, Warragul, Yarram and Drouin. The workshops help farmers cope with the pressures of drought and dry conditions.

The coalition has called on the government to act for months, and Mr Drum's motion highlights the need for

support. Three weeks ago we saw some drought assistance measures announced. The drought support package is a starting point, but it should go further to support the farmers and small businesses that are under huge financial strain. Some of the programs are reannouncements, as we have heard this afternoon. Missing were the helpful rebates for water charges and rates and more targeted business support measures. In the last drought, which occurred under the coalition government, farmers were offered discounts on their municipal rates and fixed water charges. It would be most beneficial if the Andrews government included a similar package of rate relief support programs in its current package.

Recently the federal Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, said it was time for the state to put its hand firmly into its pocket with respect to the drought. It has done so to some extent, but it needs to go further.

In summing up I would like to congratulate Mr Drum on bringing this important issue to the house. I commend the motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Debate resumed from 25 November; motion of Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan):

That this house condemns the Andrews Labor government on its first year in office, a year of putting politics before people and failing Victorian families as a result of economic mismanagement, infrastructure projects cancelled or stalled, service delivery failing, increased burdens on business, election commitments broken, factional fighting and inappropriate union influence.

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to speak on this motion. I am sure that it will come as no surprise to members that I will be speaking about the actions of the government in the seat of Albert Park. My electorate office is in Bay Street, Port Melbourne. It is a terrific community that faces many challenges, which it works on in a very collegiate way. One of those big challenges is education.

This is an issue that goes back a number of years. There has been a huge growth in the number of primary school-age children in the electorate. It has been an issue of some discussion as to how to address this growth. Both sides of politics agree that there is a need for at least one new primary school in the electorate — certainly in South Melbourne, where there is currently no primary school at all.

Before the election, competing views were put on how to address this issue. The Napthine government identified a site in Ferrars Street. It spent many millions of dollars buying that site. It cleared the buildings that were on the site and got on with the job of budgeting \$5 million in its last budget to deal with soil preparation and the site in general. It also started work on a master plan. It indicated that this was its preferred site for a new school in South Melbourne. The site is also on the edge of the Fishermans Bend area, where there is obviously going to be a huge amount of population growth in years to come. This was a site that the government had identified and got on with the job of delivering.

The then opposition had a different view. It identified a site in Albert Park — the park and not the suburb — on Albert Road. It indicated that this is where a school should be built. It called it the South Melbourne Park Primary School. The member for Albert Park promised that it would be delivered in the first term of government. I have just gone back and checked his publicity on this at the time, and that is precisely the phrase he used.

What has actually happened is quite different. We have seen a number of announcements trotted out, and they have all been put in very positive terms. But what they really represent are broken promises and delays. This has been caused by a simple lack of action. There was a school site ready to go in Ferrars Street. If it had really wanted to get on with the job of building a school, the government could have built one on the site in Ferrars Street. It chose not to. The land was owned by the education department, the site had been cleared and there was even money to be spent on preparing the site.

However, what we saw in the budget papers earlier this year was that very little of the \$5 million that had been allocated by the Napthine government had been used to continue work on preparing the site. This is a great shame and quite frankly amounts to negligence on the part of the government. In the meantime the government has apparently spent some time trying to develop its own preferred site in Albert Park. This is a problem because the site it has chosen is currently occupied by Orchestra Victoria and Parks Victoria, and they need to go somewhere before the buildings are partially demolished and prepared to be redelivered as a school. But the government has not got on with this, and that is enormously negligent.

I had an answer from the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water on the question of Parks Victoria and where it is going to go — more delay and lack of activity. There is currently no agreement on

where Parks Victoria will go within Albert Park. Parks Victoria and the education department are still debating it. Sites have been identified as possibilities, but no decisions have been made in a year. The people of Albert Park were told prior to the election that this school would be delivered in the first term of government and that money would be allocated in the first budget of an Andrews government, but that was not true. There was \$1 million allocated in the budget towards a school in South Melbourne. That is for preparation work; \$1 million is not going to deliver a school.

The government has said it will commit \$11.5 million to building a school, but it has not seen fit to do so. Delaying means the work does not happen, and the promises that were made to people who voted in good faith for the Labor Party, believing what it said — that it would deliver the Albert Park school in its first term of government — have been broken. They have been shown to be simply hollow words.

In the answer I received earlier today the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water indicated that it was anticipated that Parks Victoria would be moving out of its current premises at the old depot site in December next year. It will be December next year or maybe January 2017 before any work starts on that site. That site will require a huge amount of work. It is an old army depot. It was the centre of military activity in Albert Park in the 1940s. A very large section has been used for maintaining and housing vehicles. I would be very surprised if there have not been facilities there for petrol. As with almost every site that is built upon in South Melbourne and the City of Port Phillip, it will require very careful attention to ensure that the ground has been appropriately treated so that it can be safely built upon and people who use those facilities are not at risk.

This work, however, is all in the future. At the moment there is no school to go to. The Ferrars Street site appears to have been totally untouched over the last year. It is sitting there fenced off with a big sign saying, 'Get out, don't come in'. No work has happened there that is obvious in any way. There is a master plan that has maybe been tweaked slightly; it is hard to know. In opposition Labor criticised the Napthine government for having a plan for a multistorey school. I point out that most of the schools in the electorate of Albert Park have more than one storey, and that is because of the nature of this inner-city suburb. These two-storey schools were built well over 100 years ago because land in that area has always been at a premium.

Labor said one thing in opposition but in government is quite happy to continue working with the multistorey master plan that the previous government did the hard yards on. It does not seem that the government has made any significant change to or progress on that plan. It has coasted along using the work of the previous government, work that it was quite happy to criticise in opposition as inappropriate.

In the meantime other local schools are bearing the brunt of the lack of work done by this government in relation to education in Albert Park. They are overflowing with students. This has been the case for many years; it should be no surprise to anybody. I have spoken a number of times in this place about the issues that are confronted by Albert Park Primary School and Port Melbourne Primary School in particular.

Port Melbourne Primary School had a very simple request: it wanted to lose two single-storey portables. They were very old. They were known to be full of asbestos. Some of this was arranged to be removed a couple of days after I raised it in this place earlier this year. The school had been politely requesting for it to be done for quite some time, and it had not happened. Lo and behold, it has happened, and the safety issue has finally been dealt with, but the outstanding issue is space. What the school wants to do — and I think it is a very modest request — is get rid of two single-storey portable classrooms and replace them with two double-storey portable classrooms. The double-storey portables are much better made than the old ones. The single-storey portables look to me like the portables I went to school in, which was many years ago now.

Ms Lovell — In Belmont.

Ms FITZHERBERT — In Belmont, that is right, with the member for South Barwon in the Assembly. I look at these double-storey portables and can see why the teachers I speak to like them so much. They are better insulated, offering way better protection from cold and heat. But the critical thing for this school is that it will free up more ground space, and that is what it needs. It needs more classrooms, but it also needs more room for the children to move around in. The government has been very slow in responding to this, and it has unfortunately only delivered one double-storey portable, not the two that are needed. That school is still working out how it is going to accommodate its students.

Similarly the government has been very late to come to the party on the issue of additional land for Albert Park Primary School. This is something the school has been speaking to the government about for months. It wanted

to be able to expand into a part of Moubray Street so that it could get additional land and put in some of the additional facilities that it sorely needs as well. The school was hoping to be able to do all of this housekeeping stuff before the start of the 2016 school year, but this will not be possible because the government has been so slow in paying any attention to the school's — again — quite reasonable requests.

The school staff are saying that under the guidelines set out by the Department of Education and Training they are short dozens of toilets, but equally under the guidelines of the education department the school does not have enough space to put them in. They are saying, 'We need to be able to expand our grounds so that our 550 kids have room to run around'. There is a space where they can do this. The neighbours support this idea, as they can see the need of the school and they know that it is not going to interfere with their own amenity as local residents, and yet the school has to wait.

The school has repeatedly asked the Minister for Education to come to have a look, and my understanding is that on at least two occasions an appointment has been made but then pushed to one side, because there are other things that are more important than kids who need space for toilets. I might add that the staff at the school have to share their own toilets with students, and this is unreasonable for everybody concerned, I think, but in particular for the teachers. It is totally unreasonable, yet again it goes unaddressed.

While all of this is happening a constant refrain that I hear when I raise this issue in question time, through letters and through other means — particularly from the member for Albert Park in the Legislative Assembly — is about the years of neglect that have taken place in education. Let me put this into perspective: the member for Albert Park, as I recall, has been the member since 2007. The Napthine and Baillieu governments were in office for four years, but before that we had 11 years of a Labor government. When I look at what happened in the four years of the Napthine and Baillieu governments in relation to school education in Albert Park I see expenditure of some \$15 million, which went into identifying, buying and clearing land, creating a master plan and then allocating an additional \$5 million so that that site could be prepared.

What we have got from this government for the last year is a total lack of activity. There has been very little action. The government could have, as I said earlier, got on with building on that site, but it chose not to. Instead it has messed around in relation to its own preferred site

in Albert Park, and it is now saying that Parks Victoria will hopefully move out a year from now. It will be another year before any action happens, and yet government members have the hide to criticise the coalition parties and say that it is due to years of neglect. If there have been years of neglect, I would say they were during the 11 years of the Labor administration, when there was a local Labor member for Albert Park and a Labor state government, and yet South Melbourne was without a primary school. Now when they are playing catch-up, and not even doing that particularly effectively, they have the nerve to blame the coalition parties for this.

As I said earlier, they have coasted along on some of the work that was done by the coalition. There is a really simple solution to this: just get on with building on the site in Ferrars Street. Someone else identified it, bought it and paid for it. Someone else even left money in the budget to get on with the planning, but the government has not bothered to do anything about it. Building the school would be the way for the families in Albert Park to get the relief that they are seeking.

When I look around my electorate I see that the big issue that is worrying parents is education. It has been an absolute failure by this government, and I simply will not put up with claims that it is due to years of neglect from a coalition administration. It is actually the local Labor member, and the Labor Party members who have supported him in office for 11 years, who have neglected to do anything there. They had it all handed to them on a platter. They could have got on with it but they chose not to, and nowhere is that more obvious than in budget planning.

Those opposite will talk about how they have committed — that is their word, 'committed' — to \$11.5 million. That is a commitment, but nothing has actually arrived yet. There was nothing in the budget papers. If you were looking for \$11.5 million of capital spending, you would have been very sorely disappointed. There is \$1 million for planning, but that is not going to go very far on two schools.

The government has chosen to go out on the front foot on this, and in what I think is a quite cynical exercise it announced that it is going to open the South Melbourne Park Primary School in 2019. Before the election when the local people were thinking about voting and when the Labor Party was actually interested in what these people might want, it told them that the school would be delivered in the first term of government. Now even on the most optimistic view, it will not be. It will arrive about a year afterwards. The government also said that it will deliver not just that school but the Ferrars Street

school as well. On the figures that have been bandied about, the government is saying it will open in 2018. Judging from the progress that has been made so far, I am not terribly confident that this will happen either.

What I would want for a school that is going to open in 2018 is some indication of the plan — which was already started by the previous government — being finalised and some money allocated, because capital funding is really the big thing that is missing in all of this.

If I were to give some marks to the government in relation to its first year and to the centrepiece of its local offering to the voters and people of Albert Park, which related to education, I would give it a big fail. The government sat on its hands. It has chosen not to allocate money and it has chosen not to start building. It has persisted in devoting its time to progressing a school in Albert Park which had some obvious challenges, to use a polite word, with the site. It is well known that there is historic use of the site in Albert Park, which means that there needs to be some careful planning done to make sure it is safe. It has at least two current tenants, which need to be relocated to another home. They do not have one yet. The other issue is that the site itself is heritage listed, so there are issues in terms of how it can be dealt with and how it can be reconstructed.

Lastly, it is my understanding that like many old buildings it contains asbestos. It is an enormously challenging site. I will freely concede that it is difficult to find appropriate sites within Albert Park. It is a built-up inner city area, and it is hard to find a site that is going to accommodate a school in an adequate way. But there is a site there; it was left to the government. It is owned by the government and it is ready to go, and the government has chosen not to use it. As I said earlier, my advice to the government would be to focus on that and try allocating some capital funding because that is what will get it done.

When I look at the issue that the government set itself up on in terms of delivery, it is a big fail, and no amount of trying to dress that up is going to change it. People need to enrol their children in schools now. People who are sending their kids to local schools are dealing with the practical fallout from the failure of this government to address the issue of space which it has had years to address. It has simply chosen not to.

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I am delighted to speak on this absolutely foolish motion. Goodness me! No wonder those opposite lost the election 12 months ago. Talk about

living in fairyland. Seriously, we have a motion like this from a party that gave us the most moribund government this state has ever seen. It is a party that left this state with the highest unemployment rate in 13 years — 6.7 per cent. This was a government that every single correspondent and every person in the industry recognised had left this state with a moribund economy, with business confidence at rock bottom, with schools that were strapped for funding and with TAFEs that were absolutely devastated.

What a disgrace this is. It is as if those opposite have forgotten what happened during those years when they were in government. Remember those first three years under Mr Baillieu? Nothing happened. We had the first, the second and the third year, and people were waiting for something to happen, for anything to happen, for anything to be said. No, it was like the Tweedledum and Tweedledee show — inactive, no policy, no action, no capital projects. The ministry was on a go-slow. Ministers were locked in their ministries and not getting out in the country and doing anything.

This is not me complaining. This is not Labor complaining. This was being said right across Victoria, and that played out at the last election because those opposite did nothing — absolutely zip, zero, zilch! There was no leadership. There was no action. This state fell down the ladder of economic development. We used to be proud competitors with New South Wales, and we are again, but not under the leadership of the coalition, not after the last four years.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — You can talk, but the facts are there. After one year we have an unemployment rate that is down to 5.6 per cent. We have the highest jobs growth in the country. We have overtaken New South Wales in economic growth. We have developed 72 000 new jobs in 12 months. They are real figures. Those opposite can bang on as much as they like. I hear them talking about Prahran Primary School. Is there a time warp here? Do those opposite not remember that the massive TAFE campus at Swinburne in Prahran was closed under their government because of the funding cuts they made? It is like the last three years have all been blanked from their minds and now they are living in a little hobbit hole in their own little world, totally devoid of reality. The reality is here. We have a government that is on the move, is doing things for this state and is active.

Those opposite can wail and cry. What about the \$4 billion education budget. We are the education state. We said we would be the education state and we have

given this state the highest education budget it has ever had. It is \$4 billion. Those opposite should think of that when they are considering the cuts they made over the previous four years. It was an absolute disgrace.

There are new industry initiatives, there is a new deal for rural Victoria and there is a massive boost to TAFE of course as part of that education initiative. I am happy not to go through every single achievement because, quite frankly, I do not have time to do that. However, I will talk about TAFE because that is something I am pretty proud of. I will talk about training. Let us talk about TAFE and training. In four years we saw TAFEs and training in this state plummet from being the best in this country to being indisputably the worst. That is shown on every single index. We saw 3000 teachers pulled out of our TAFE colleges. We saw campuses closed right across the state. Members of The Nationals sat by and let the economic rationalists in the Treasury gut their country TAFEs, close their campuses, slash their staff, and stop that opportunity. They sat by with their heads between their legs while the economic rationalists that are their coalition partners gutted country TAFEs. They know it, their country towns know it and their country TAFEs know it.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, I would hate the minister to be inadvertently misleading the house by alleging — which contradicts what he said today — that we had deregulated the TAFEs when it was his own party that did so in 2009.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! Mrs Peulich knows very well that she is debating the issue. That is not a point of order.

Mr HERBERT — Nothing could be further from the truth than what was just said. But let us not talk about those dark, dreary, glum days that destroyed opportunities in TAFEs and in communities across this state. With our hands on our hearts, let us have a look at what has happened. Quality control went out the window. Nothing was happening under the previous government. Rorting was rampant. Industry would not accept the qualifications.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — You can squeal now. Why did you not squeal when you were in government about what your cabinet did to training and TAFE in this state?

We have had the biggest quality review in our state's history. We have backed it up not just with words, not with empty fairy floss rhetoric, not with just a bit of babble here and a bit of babble there. There has been a

\$9 million blitz this year alone, and \$10 million extra for the next three years to crack down on the rorters who flourished under the coalition's administration and bring back quality to our TAFE and training sector.

When it comes to TAFE, let us be clear. This government's first act was \$20 million to rebuild funding. Its second act was \$15 million in Back to Work funds for TAFEs to realign their businesses with local and community activity. We have just announced \$20 million for a reconnect for those young people who cannot do straight-off training but need an opportunity to get in there. There is \$8.4 million in the south-east for an industry plan with Holmesglen and Chisholm TAFEs to give retrenched automotive workers a chance to get another job. There is \$15 million for jobs and skill sectors right across the state to link real skills. There will be one-stop shops where students and businesses can come in and get real advice about jobs and training opportunities to give them a chance.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — I know members opposite do not care about that. I understand that they do not care about those opportunities. They are on about rhetoric, and we see that in the motion. There is a bit of drivel here and a bit of rhetoric there. We are on about real achievements and giving people a real chance.

There is \$50 million to boost skills and apprenticeships, and I will say a little more about that because these reforms are occurring at a time when apprenticeship and traineeship numbers right across the east coast — in fact right across Australia — have been in decline, and that has made them difficult. But I will tell members where it has come from. It has come from the massive rorting of federal VET FEE-HELP, sucking thousands of young people, including apprentices who should have been doing proper certificate training, into online degrees and diplomas that will never get them a job. Quite frankly the federal government should have acted more quickly, and instead of banging on here, opposition members should have done something about it, but they just sat there.

Of course there is then the reopening of the Lilydale TAFE. We made a commitment. The coalition government let the only university TAFE in the Yarra Valley go under as a result of its funding cuts. Opposition members could not open it; it was all too hard, so they opened a little factory on the road for a bit of online learning. We said we would open the TAFE, and we have opened it. It will start next year, and there will be good enrolments in its first year.

In relation to TAFE teachers, I said that 3000 had gone. For three years when in government, opposition members could not get a salary rise for them. They could not get a piece of paper past their Treasurer for a salary rise for the hardworking TAFE teachers. We have done it in our first year in office, and that enterprise bargaining agreement has brought stability. While these measures are designed to strengthen our TAFEs — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! I say to members on my left that I would like to hear the minister.

Mr HERBERT — There is \$150 million over and above our TAFE Rescue Fund and over and above the \$39 million which was still trickling through from the TAFE Structural Adjustment Fund. I am happy to admit that. I am happy to admit that there was a bit of money still struggling through. That is real money, real initiatives and real support.

Over and above that I have said many times that the system and the changes that occurred in 2012, when the former government changed the subsidy rates to raise the cost of training to unaffordable levels, skewed the entire quality debate. We have had Bruce Mackenzie and Neil Coulson, who are great educators and industry representatives, working through a report. They have had extensive consultation with industry and training providers right across the sector, and that will be the basis for a new funding model.

It has been a big year. It has been a successful year, and vocational education and training has been the same as every other industry. Government members have got down to work. We have not sat in cabinet twiddling our thumbs saying, 'What am I going to do? We can't trust the public service. We don't know where we should go. Don't say anything because you might get into trouble'. This government has got down and done the job. This state is better for it, and if the opposition were to realise that, stop talking fairy floss rhetoric and do its job properly, the state would be even better.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: *Portfolio Departments and Associated Entities — 2014–15 Audit Snapshot*

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — What fortuitous timing that I follow the perplexing contribution of the Minister for Training and Skills.

Coincidentally my contribution to statements on reports and papers today is on Department of Education and Training strategic planning, so there is a little bit of a confluence of good fortune.

In talking about the Department of Education and Training and its many challenges that lie ahead, I will first talk about the lack of vision and the lack of appreciation of reality that we have just seen from Mr Herbert in trying to revise history by attributing the deregulation of TAFEs to the Liberal Party. I remind the house about Labor's shameful record on education, which unfortunately has extended over many years. After 11 years in office, before the coalition government won office — that is, before 2010 — Victorian Labor left a \$420 million backlog in school maintenance. It would have been really nice to have been able to build new schools or upgrade schools to meet modern needs, but we had to patch up the shambolic state of the schools left by Labor after 11 years in office.

In 1992, after the Cain and Kirner governments, there was a \$620 million backlog in school maintenance. That in itself shows the failings of Labor and, regrettably, the lack of strategic planning by the department, which I must admit we were unable to turn around in a mere four years under a coalition government.

It shows there are problems especially in financial administration, which is commented on in today's Auditor-General's report entitled *Portfolio Departments and Associated Entities — 2014–15 Audit Snapshot*. It identifies the problem of the financial reports of individual schools being fully substantiated and verified and therefore being incorporated into the consolidated reports of the department. Clearly tight financial administration of schools is absolutely critical, especially in a more autonomous environment. Any government should be looking at making sure that the principal of a school is the educational leader of a school and not necessarily the business development and financial administrator.

In addition it is clear that we need to beef up the skills of school councillors, essentially the school board, which plays a critical role in overseeing the operations of schools including the financial reporting processes. The Auditor-General claims they have demonstrated poor reconciliation preparation and poor controls surrounding journals and the financial statement report preparation process as a whole. These issues do not just dog the education department; they are a problem across many departments.

Coming back to the lack of strategic planning, I note that the inability of the government that actually introduced a reform such as the deregulation of TAFE to be honest about what it was trying to do does not augur well for the department's strategic planning. Labor's funding of vocational education and training was 50 per cent lower in 2010 than it was under each year of the Victorian coalition government's term, so there goes the lie that Liberals — the coalition — cut education. It is an absolute lie that is continually perpetuated by Labor and each of its successive ministers, and Mr Herbert sang from the same hymn book.

In 2008, when Labor deregulated TAFEs, the Australian Education Union federal TAFE secretary said the reforms 'amount to the dismantling of the public TAFE system'. Those opposite, however, keep on talking about how the Liberals cut TAFEs and how the Liberals gutted TAFEs. It was Labor, and we have a question: why did Labor do it? It did it because it would see the movement of public funds to registered training organisations affiliated with Labor's unions — with Labor's henchmen. There is a need —

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

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning: onshore unconventional gas in Victoria

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Today I would like to make a statement on the *Inquiry into Onshore Unconventional Gas in Victoria — Final Report*, which was completed by the Legislative Council's environment and planning committee. When the report was tabled the other day I did not get a chance to really express my appreciation and admiration for the secretariat members, who came along with the committee to a number of regional hearings, including overnight trips, who had to process a record number of submissions made to this committee inquiry and who did a great job in supporting us in developing this report. I pass on my admiration and appreciation to Keir Delaney, the secretary; Dr Catriona Ross, the inquiry officer, who did a lot of the drafting work; Ms Annemarie Burt, who did a great job as a research assistant; and also — coming on late but a great help — Mr Ben Hall, from the RMIT school of civil, environmental and chemical engineering, who helped us with our queries around the water table; and the people in the Council committees office, especially Anthony Walsh, who did a great job in assisting us as well.

As I said, this inquiry received a record number of submissions. There was great interest from people wanting to present at the hearings. There were a number of regional hearings, including in Sale, Hamilton and Torquay — areas that could be affected by an unconventional gas industry. I appreciate the efforts and the work of committee members who made the effort to go to those hearings. I want to make mention of the chair, David Davis, and the deputy chair, Harriet Shing, for chairing and getting the rest of the committee to work together quite well. As I said, it was a difficult report to work on and to deliver. There were varying views on the outcome, but I think the end report, in terms of being a tool for the government, will be a good tool for the government to go ahead with.

Ms Shing and I came to a conclusion, which led to a vote in the committee which was supported by Ms Dunn and Mr Young, with respect to our belief that there should be a permanent ban on unconventional gas exploration that involves fracking. We weighed up the community interest and the interests of established industries such as the dairy industry and other agricultural industries, including lamb and beef exports. We learnt a great deal about those directly from farmers at the hearings. At one hearing at Hamilton a number of farmers presented to us in person, and one farmer provided great detail about the accreditation process farmers have to go through to export their produce via Queensland. It is a process where they have to acknowledge that the produce they are sending out is clean and green, and if they do not sign off that there might be an unconventional gas exploration operation nearby, they are breaking the law, and that will affect their market. They are 100 per cent of the belief that operations like this will affect their exports.

To me it is madness to jeopardise great, established industries for the sake of an industry in relation to which, as the evidence indicated, no-one is really sure if there are commercial pockets of gas that can be attained by unconventional extraction means. That led me to believe that this is an industry that should be banned permanently. It is not an industry for Victoria, which is a small geographical state with very precious industries. As I said before, there is the dairy industry — and I think 80 per cent of Australia's dairy products come out of Victoria — and the state has a small geographical area. That industry represents a great economic input to the state, and it should not be jeopardised, especially by the main proponents —

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

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning: onshore unconventional gas in Victoria

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I too would like to speak on the *Inquiry into Onshore Unconventional Gas in Victoria — Final Report*, and I too would like to very much thank the staff, who had a very difficult job in compiling the report given the complex nature of the inquiry. Thanks go to Keir Delaney, Catriona Ross and Annemarie Burt, as well as to Ben Hall from the school of civil, environmental and chemical engineering at RMIT University and also to Kim Martinow de Navarrete, Esma Poskovic and Anthony Walsh, who also contributed and supported the committee in its deliberations.

This was one of the biggest inquiries I have participated in as a committee member, with 1862 submissions. I cannot remember there being an inquiry, certainly in my short time here in this place, that has dealt with so many submissions, as well as most of the submitters having their submissions posted publicly on the website. The chair, Mr David Davis, was very keen to make sure that all the submissions made — where there was not compromising of some of the detail — were put straight onto the website so that people could have easy access to the submissions.

The committee made 15 recommendations in its report, and I think it will help pave the way for the government in its deliberations, particularly in view of the Victorian Auditor-General's report, on a risk management and regulatory framework around the current unconventional gas exploration requirement. There has been a lot of discussion around whether we should ban onshore unconventional gas exploration totally or in part through a moratorium. But let us not forget the 15 recommendations in the report, which were agreed to by all members and which will help mitigate the risk in relation to the regulatory framework that the government should look at when formulating its final position on this issue.

I have certainly been asked through Twitter and Facebook my position on unconventional gas, given that I am a farmer. I have sat through all the hearings. As Mr Leane said, the committee went to some trouble to make sure that regional Victoria was represented, so it held regional hearings, including in Sale. Obviously in East Gippsland there is a basin that the industry is looking at for potential unconventional gas extraction, and in Hamilton and in the Otway Basin the industry is also looking at potentially some shale and tight gas extraction. It was important for us to make sure that we heard from the communities of those two areas.

Equally, there is real concern among community groups down at Torquay particularly about the impact of fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, as a method of gas extraction, especially along those coastal belts. There is no doubt that those communities told the committee loudly and clearly that they want a total ban on fracking in their communities along the coastal strip. The farmers up in Hamilton said they also wanted a total ban. They made clear their real concerns about their livelihood, the quality of the water and the potential risk of contamination of the environment and the land and said they felt that nothing less than a total ban on onshore unconventional gas exploration would meet their needs.

On the other side, the mining industry said it needed some certainty from the government as to the position it might take and whether there would be any opportunity for them to invest in some exploration work to see whether the extraction of unconventional gas is viable or possible. They have indicated they need to know the government's position so they can have some long-term certainty about whether or not they will be allowed to extract unconventional gas in Victoria.

Of course in the mix we currently have a moratorium which does not separate conventional from unconventional gas exploration. In its deliberations the committee was, I guess unfortunately, working on the basis of the current moratorium under which conventional and unconventional gas exploration were thrown in together, whereas we know there has been quite successful gas exploration by use of conventional methods down around Port Campbell, both on the land — —

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

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning: onshore unconventional gas in Victoria

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I also rise to speak on the final report of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning on onshore unconventional gas in Victoria. It has been interesting to note the minority reports appended to the final report. They show that four coalition members want an extension of the current moratorium, two government members want a permanent ban on unconventional gas and one government member wants a three-year moratorium on unconventional gas with the removal of conventional gas from the ban.

I have to say that in this case I can only concur with those members of the committee who believe a permanent ban is the best way forward for Victoria in terms of not only providing certainty to the many stakeholders who presented to the committee but also protecting Victoria's environment, water supply, air, soil and public health as well. At this point, given what appears to be a split in the views of government members in relation to this matter, the government really needs to determine whether it wants to be pro-polluting industry or pro-community. That is the choice it has.

The reality is that we received hundreds of submissions from community members, all of them very heartfelt, describing the amount of angst that exists in regional Victoria in relation to unconventional gas activities. I thank those communities for their efforts and their constant advocacy around this issue. There have been, I guess, some extraordinary displays of opposition to unconventional gas activities in Victoria. At the current time I believe 69 communities across Victoria have declared themselves gas field free. That is an extraordinary number of people from 69 different townships in Victoria saying, 'Enough is enough. We don't want this industry here. This isn't for us. Our future is, in the main, either within tourism or in agriculture'.

I must say those Victorians in regional Victoria are immensely proud of their contribution to our economy. We heard from many farmers who have very grave concerns about the impact of unconventional gas exploration or extraction on their farmland and also the impact on their reputation as clean and green primary producers. There is a consistent message out there in Victoria that we have a wonderful reputation when it comes to our product and that that reputation would be very much compromised should we go down the road of unconventional gas activities.

It was disappointing to me that the committee could not resolve the main question around a permanent ban versus an extension of a moratorium. As I stated earlier, in my mind the only way to make sure that the views of the community are reflected and those environmental protections are in place is to have a permanent ban. It was also disappointing to me that we could not go to other states in Australia to have conversations directly with those communities about their experiences in relation to unconventional gas exploration activities. The best I could get was a viewing of *Frackman*, which I have to say was compelling in the sense of the impact on the community of Chinchilla and the story of what happened there. It is a very sad tale indeed, and I would hate to see that tale repeated in Victoria.

I can only hope the Labor government makes the right decision, and that is a decision that is pro-community and pro the voices of all those people across Victoria who completely reject unconventional gas as a way forward in our state. This will be the real test for the government as to whether it really wants to see action on climate change because of the fugitive emissions involved with an unconventional gas activity, and it will be the test of whether it really does care about communities and about regional Victoria.

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning: onshore unconventional gas in Victoria

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I too rise to speak on the report of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning on its onshore unconventional gas inquiry. There was unanimous agreement among members of the committee concerning the putting in place of appropriate legislative and regulatory safeguards should an unconventional gas industry commence in Victoria. The major point of difference was when or indeed if this industry should get the go-ahead in Victoria. The two competing principal propositions considered by the committee were as follows: an outright ban on the unconventional gas industry in Victoria or a five-year extension of the current moratorium.

While I acknowledge the powerful evidence received by the committee concerning the risk of unconventional gas extraction to human health and the environment, I do not believe an outright ban is the right action to take. An outright ban on unconventional gas does not make allowances for future technological advances that may make unconventional gas more palatable in the future, so it could result in missed opportunities for the competitiveness of our economy and the living standards of Victorians. However, a moratorium on unconventional gas should only be applied for another three years — not five — given the speed at which technological advances may take place. I also reject the recommendation of extending the current moratorium, since a mere extension of the current moratorium as proposed by coalition members would incorporate conventional gas.

The refusal of coalition members of the committee to decouple conventional and unconventional gas from their recommendation to extend the moratorium on onshore drilling, when the committee's terms of reference did not require the committee to investigate conventional gas, is misleading because it creates the impression that the committee investigated the extraction of conventional gas. I therefore believe the

inclusion of conventional gas in the five-year moratorium, as recommended by the committee coalition members, is arbitrary. It is not based on any evidence received by this inquiry. As a result of coalition members recommending an extension to a moratorium on conventional gas as part of the moratorium on unconventional gas, I incorporated recommendations concerning conventional gas into this report.

The committee heard significant evidence that pressure is mounting for domestic gas prices to rise to a level equivalent to international prices, before the cost of liquefaction and transport is added. This would result in a doubling of gas prices for the domestic market. Yet cheap gas is the backbone of Victoria's manufacturing industry, and it is also used extensively in domestic and commercial premises as both a feedstock and an energy source. It also has the potential to be an interim form of base load energy as the state transitions from brown coal to renewables.

While the committee emphasised the importance of maintaining a cheap ongoing supply of gas to Victoria, it did not make recommendations on the importance of implementing policy instruments to put downward pressure on gas prices. The importance of proceeding with onshore gas production in the medium term cannot be overemphasised. In the United States rising shale gas production has had an enormous impact in terms of jobs, increased manufacturing competitiveness and boosting the economy. This is because, as in Australia, gas is an important component in manufacturing and industrial processes. As a result the United States went from being an importer of energy, mainly from the Middle East, to now being a net exporter of energy. If a non-fracking onshore conventional gas industry is allowed to proceed and it finds considerable onshore gas that can be extracted using conventional means, there are potentially massive benefits for the Victorian economy.

In conclusion, where governments have policy levers at their disposal they should be using them if it means saving or creating jobs. The policy levers the Andrews government can utilise are, as I outlined in my minority report, to immediately discontinue the moratorium on conventional gas wells on the basis that any proposal to drill a conventional well will include a number of commitments by the applicants, including a commitment to reserve a percentage of the resource for local businesses or consumers at a price below the prevailing local price.

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

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning: onshore unconventional gas in Victoria

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to speak today on the final report of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning inquiry into onshore unconventional gas. The environment and planning committee, of which I am a member, sought stakeholder and community views on a range of issues relating to unconventional gas and had an overwhelming response with submissions. There has been much interest from stakeholders, including farmers, environmental and community groups, the gas industry, scientists, state and local governments, and members of the public.

As a member for Eastern Victoria Region, the issue of unconventional gas has been a hot topic in my area. In Victoria the onshore portions of both the Gippsland and the Otway basins have been identified as regions where unconventional gas may be found due to the geology of the area. The prospects are still questionable. There are no guarantees that unconventional gas is even there, and if it were there, whether it would be commercially viable to extract. As the interest in Gippsland from companies exploring these resources grew, so too did community opinion on unconventional gas mining.

There have always been concerns about the impact of contamination from this type of mining on prime agricultural land, which Gippsland has in abundance, as well as the impact on the water table and the environment. In 2012 the then coalition government announced a moratorium on issuing new exploration licences for coal seam gas and on fracking. This also covers new development of conventional gas on land. Currently the unconventional gas industry, which includes shale, tight and coal seam gas, is substantial in states such as New South Wales and Queensland, but there has been no commercial extraction in Victoria and only limited exploration, which was approved under the former Labor government.

The report before us today looks at the background of unconventional gas, Victoria's prospects for commercial sources of unconventional gas and, importantly, the risks of unconventional gas extraction. The report also summarises community and industry views and touches on some of the scientific research and regulation of the industry. The exact way forward in relation to regulating the industry could not be agreed on by a majority of the committee. Unfortunately due to the abundance of information, submissions and research, the committee did not have the resources to sufficiently examine all aspects of the evidence submitted.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition members minority report points out that the hurdles faced by the committee included the fact that we were not able to travel interstate to properly examine other regulatory systems, even though we were advised to do so. It was also disappointing that the Minister for Energy and Resources failed to appear before the committee on two occasions.

That aside, it became very clear to me and to my coalition colleagues that there is still much work to be done in investigating this issue. With the information and evidence before us, the coalition members felt a further five-year moratorium on all onshore gas exploration and production in Victoria was the best way forward. I believe this is a sensible approach. This proposition is also in line with the Victorian Farmers Federation's view on extending the moratorium to 2020.

When in government we put in place a moratorium. I believe the Auditor-General's report tabled in August proved there is still a lot more work that needs to be done around investigating water and land use. This five-year moratorium would also permit further investigation of other jurisdictions' regulatory frameworks, which could not be done properly this time around, and also development of a world's best practice regulatory environment for Victoria. Unfortunately our proposition was rejected.

My concern is that banning the unconventional gas industry in Victoria does not address the onshore conventional gas industry. Our proposed moratorium covers a hold on granting exploration licences for all types of onshore gas — tight, shale, coal seam and conventional gas. Labor's ban on unconventional gas could potentially mean wells could pop up on properties around the state in no time, and I do not believe we are at the stage to let any onshore gas activity go ahead as inherent risks such as aquifer contamination are similar to those of mining unconventional gas. Under no circumstances can we put the health of our natural environment at risk, because Victoria's farming economy is critical to the health of our state.

While it is disappointing that the committee could not agree on recommending either a moratorium or a ban, we still have to respond to our terms of reference, and therefore the recommendations relating to any future unconventional gas industry in Victoria stated in the report are sensible. I thank the committee, the secretariat and Hansard staff for their work.

Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure: infrastructure projects

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I am delighted to rise to speak on the *First Report into Infrastructure Projects*, which was prepared by the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure. I thank all those who contributed to this report, as I outlined on Tuesday. In addition I would like to thank those who appeared before the committee during public hearings for their time and effort. They are Mr Scott Charlton, Mr Kevin Devlin, Mr Gary Liddle, Mr John Merritt, Mr Evan Tattersall and Mr Robert Vaughan. In addition I thank the Minister for Public Transport, the Honourable Jacinta Allan for her ongoing contribution and support.

The report is the first from the committee on this inquiry. Reports will be released every six months on the progress of the selected key infrastructure projects in Victoria. These five projects include the level crossing removal program, the western distributor, the Melbourne Metro rail project, the sale or lease of the port of Melbourne and the Melbourne Airport rail link.

The creation of infrastructure projects in Victoria provides significant opportunities and benefits to the state's economy and the livelihoods of Victorians across the state. Currently infrastructure projects commenced by the Victorian government are worth more than \$49 billion. Following the last state election the Labor government proudly announced the level crossing removal program and, in addition to this, the Melbourne Metro rail project and the western distributor. All these important projects have been designed to keep Victorians safer when using Victoria's roads and transport system and to get them to their destinations sooner.

On completion of this first report, the projects examined are still in their very early stages, with many details yet to be finalised. Therefore the overall goal of the committee during 2015 has been to focus on identifying the government's expectations of what benefits the projects will deliver and how they will be managed.

The five key infrastructure projects that the committee's report analysed are pivotal for Victoria. The level crossing removal project was the result of the government's commitment to remove 50 of the state's worst level crossings. The government has undertaken to remove 20 of these crossings by 2018, which will be of significant benefit to motorists and all Victorians. The western distributor is a key proposal by the government to take traffic off the West Gate Bridge by

providing an alternative route from the West Gate Freeway to West Melbourne. The proposal includes a tunnel and elevated motorway through Yarraville and Footscray, which has been of considerable concern to residents living in these areas.

I note that Transurban has indicated in the report that the western distributor will nearly halve travel times for trips to the city from the M80-West Gate Freeway interchange during the morning peak and help wipe 15 minutes off trips to the city from Geelong and Ballarat. It will take up to 50 per cent of trucks off local roads in the inner west, improving livability.

The report also outlines plans for the Melbourne Metro rail project, which involves building two 9-kilometre rail tunnels from South Kensington to South Yarra, travelling underneath Swanston Street in the CBD. The tunnels will link the Sunbury line with the Cranbourne-Pakenham line and allow for five new stations at Arden, Parkville, CBD North, CBD South and Domain.

The report did not look at the proposed lease of the port of Melbourne, as another committee was considering this matter in more detail at the same time. I wish the committee all the best for its next report on these innovative projects. I commend the report to the house.

Port of Melbourne Select Committee: port of Melbourne lease

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise this evening to speak on the Legislative Council Port of Melbourne Select Committee inquiry report into the proposed lease of the port of Melbourne, which was tabled in Parliament yesterday. This is a very topical subject, and I have to say this report is an excellent contribution by members of that committee. I note that Mr Purcell is in the chamber, and I commend him on the contribution he made, along with many others, in particular the chair of the committee, Gordon Rich-Phillips, who, from what I can gather, conducted a thorough and well-thought-through inquiry process on this important issue.

If you look at the Chairman's foreword in the report, you will see that it states:

The committee has considered a number of key elements of the proposed lease, looking at the long-term interests of Victoria, and the need to maximise flexibility and certainty for Victorians.

...

The inability of government to provide certainty as to how key provisions of the transaction will work, and the resulting exposure for the state in the longer term is of concern.

They are salient remarks, and they indicate the reason why there is considerable discussion amongst the government and the opposition in relation to the proposed bill and getting a proper process for future Victorians — not just our generation, but the generations to come.

There are many elements of the port proposal that I am particularly concerned about after having had time to read the report. The port of Melbourne is in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region, and I have previously raised concerns in the house about the large number of truck movements along Beach Road and Beaconsfield Parade. After reading this report I am particularly concerned at the projections of how big the port will potentially be and the increase in traffic flows. The considerable health, safety and environmental effects from the truck movements alone are of concern.

I note the contributions by the many submitters. One of the submitters who made their concerns known about the environmental impacts in a number of areas was the Association of Bayside Municipalities. The association was particularly concerned about the dredging of the bay. On page 45 of the report there is talk of the impact of traffic around the port of Melbourne and also the need for ongoing monitoring of the bay. But I would like to draw attention to the environmental impacts, because the report highlights that:

Between 2008 and 2009, PoMC undertook an almost \$1 billion infrastructure project to deepen channels in Port Phillip Bay to allow access for larger container ships with draughts from 11.6 metres to 14 metres. In addition to deepening the channels, the project involved transporting and disposing of dredged material to underwater storage sites, upgrading shipping berths to accommodate larger vessels in deeper water, upgrading, replacing and installing new navigational aids and protecting utility tunnels, pipelines and cables affected by the dredging activity and the movement of larger cargo ships.

So if that happened back in 2008 and 2009 with the ship movements that we are seeing today, just imagine what will be required to cater for the larger ships of the 21st century — more movements and a greater size of ships. I think that is a considerable concern, which I am particularly concerned about, in relation to protecting the amenity of our bay.

There are many other aspects I want to speak about in relation to this report, but there is one element I would like to go to finally, and I will speak to it further I am sure in other contributions. I was disappointed to read that members of the government had written in their minority report regarding the compensation clause:

To provide bidders with absolutely no clarity or certainty in relation to key aspects of sovereign risk could result in

multiple bidders dropping out of the tendering process and remaining bidders heavily discounting their bids.

I find that an extraordinary statement from this government, which has sent ricochets right around the world in relation to its conduct in ripping up the east–west link contract and the concerns of sovereign risk for future Victorian governments.

Auditor-General: *Local Government — 2014–15 Audit Snapshot*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak to the Auditor-General's report entitled *Local Government — 2014–15 Audit Snapshot*. As a former local government councillor I was pleased to see the outcome of the snapshot report on the performance and financial status of local councils across Victoria for the year 2014–15.

According to the report, the sector generated a net surplus of more than \$900 million annually in each of the past five financial years. The sector's net surplus was \$1.5 billion in 2014–15 and \$923.6 million in 2013–14. The increase was partly driven by the advance payments of \$269.8 million of commonwealth grants in 2014–15.

There appears to be a degree of underspending in the capital works area and a reluctance to financially maintain existing assets by some local councils. But to my mind it seems mean or carping to excessively criticise the overview result of the audit, given the apparent financial good health of local councils overall. However, notwithstanding their current economic viability, ongoing improvements should be made to strengthen the framework around risk identification, management, monitoring and reporting.

If assets are not maintained, they will very quickly subsume the savings made at the outset and in the long run they will be more costly to replace than to regularly maintain. There is still some work to be done by a number of councils in line with the new reporting mechanisms established this year to highlight possible risks encountered by low maintenance and management of infrastructure assets over time. Local councils must face the challenge of meeting the higher costs of maintaining their assets, because with the introduction of rate capping in 2016–17 they will need to have a sound practical strategy in place to meet the growing needs of residents and ratepayers.

The Auditor-General has made a couple of recommendations, which are, as always, worthy of support and implementation. They are to, firstly, actively manage and monitor their rate of capital and

renewal spending to at least meet the consumption rate of their assets, and secondly, annually review their landfill sites for remediation and after-care costs and recognise a liability in accordance with the accounting standards.

I thank the Victorian Auditor-General's Office for its interesting and well-written report.

Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources: report 2014–15

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak tonight on the annual report 2014–15 of the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, and particularly about the transport part of this department. In the report, in volume 1 — it is a three-volume report — on page 9 it says:

Transport — plans and coordinates the state's transport system, including leading strategic policy development and transport reform, integrating network planning, overseeing transport regulation and safety, and coordinating the delivery of transport infrastructure projects.

I have a few infrastructure projects that the department might actually be interested in. Everybody in the house is probably well aware that we have a number of problems on the Shepparton line, and I will go into some of those, particularly in relation to Shepparton, in a minute. First of all I would like to talk about a constituent who contacted me this week. She was very unhappy about the state of the service that she had experienced during the rail portion of a return trip from Cobram to Melbourne. She is also concerned about the lack of direct passenger rail services from Cobram to Melbourne and back.

This constituent actually said that while she and her four travelling companions reserved seats for the return leg of their journey, there were no seats that were physically reserved for them. She also advised that there was no overhead luggage rack, no buffet car and that it was a slow, rough and noisy journey overall. Essentially she felt that the standard of the service was not suitable for a long journey. This is not something new; this is something that everyone who travels on the Shepparton train says. Of course if you are on that train going to Cobram, when you get to Shepparton you need to transfer to a coach service. In her own words, she said:

When compared to the services on Bendigo and Gippsland lines, we are very much given a second-rate service.

The people of Numurkah and Cobram, as I said, would like to see a direct rail service extended from Shepparton to Cobram rather than a rail service to

Shepparton which then transfers to a coach service to Numurkah and Cobram. That is one project that the department could look at — a service to Shepparton that travels on through Numurkah to Cobram, giving the people of Numurkah and Cobram a direct rail service — but the rail services between Shepparton and Melbourne are appalling. We have virtually no service. An email that I received last night at 11.29 p.m. states:

When are they going to do something about our trains? I travelled last Wednesday on the 6.30 a.m. train to Melbourne. It was hot on the train, and when the train started up the heater/aircon come on and all we could smell was dust. I was unwell all day with a headache. This carriage was dirty, and when we got past Seymour, people were standing in the unreserved carriage coming home on the 6.20 p.m. Once the tickets were checked we did not even see the conductor. In the unreserved carriage there were young teenagers jumping over seat to seat. There was no-one around to stop them. If these children were on drugs (ice) they may have been mad. Who was around to help passengers if they were on drugs? Where is the security on the train ...

That was from another constituent. We know that the services between Shepparton and Melbourne are appalling and filthy, the carriages are old and need to be improved. Our service needs to improve, and we need additional services. The Sunbury and Diggers Rest communities had an additional 80 train services announced for them by this government, but the Shepparton service consists of only four trains daily from Shepparton to Melbourne, three return from Melbourne to Shepparton and two return services on Saturdays and Sundays. We are very much the poor relation when it comes to rail services. As I said, the trains are antiquated and slow.

We also need additional bus services in Shepparton. Public transport in Shepparton is a disgrace. There has already been a review of the Shepparton line. The government should get on with delivering some of the outcomes of that review. We have seen a number of outcomes announced for other areas. I have spoken about the outcome for the Sunbury and Diggers Rest communities. A bigger, better bus service for Bendigo was recently announced, but in Shepparton we cannot even get buses on Sundays or Saturday afternoons, so Shepparton is being treated unfairly by the Andrews government. We would very much like to see some investment in rail services for Shepparton and also public transport services. The Cobram and Numurkah communities would like to see investment in services for them.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Prescription monitoring

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment contribution tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and the action that I seek is that she commit to and implement a comprehensive real-time prescription monitoring system as soon as possible. There are some key elements of what a comprehensive scheme would look like, which I will go through, and that is what we need to have implemented. This is an issue that the coroner has repeatedly raised in association with many deaths. Real-time prescription monitoring can save lives. In 2014 the Coroners Court investigated 384 overdose deaths, 82 per cent of which involved prescription medicine. More Victorians are dying from prescription drug overdoses each year than on the state's roads. It is a dramatic number and needs action.

What does a comprehensive scheme look like? The elements have to include that it is real time so that the pharmacists and the doctors can get real-time, up-to-date data. It needs to be a compulsory scheme so that everyone is involved, and it needs to include all drugs of addiction, not just the schedule 8 drugs. It needs to integrate all prescribing and dispensing systems, and it needs to make sure that all doctors and pharmacists are engaged. They need to be able to use the system seamlessly. The scheme needs to allow for the legitimate use of analgesics by specific consumers such as those who are receiving palliative care. We need to make sure that the rollout has appropriate training and also referral pathways for patients and individuals who are identified as part of the scheme.

In the lead-up to the last election the coalition committed nearly \$7 million to the rollout of real-time prescription monitoring, and we heard nothing from the Labor Party. But we did get \$300 000 in the budget this year for planning. Consultations are underway, and stakeholders are very concerned that the scheme will not be comprehensive. Particularly they are concerned that it will be restricted to schedule 8 drugs only and will not include all drugs of dependence. Some schedule 4 and schedule 3 medicines play a very significant part in drug misuse and overdose deaths, such as benzodiazepines and over-the-counter codeine. Secondly, stakeholders are very concerned that the scheme will not be integrated in terms of the

prescribing and dispensing, the involvement of doctors and pharmacists, and also the IT platforms that are used.

I have a letter from Ben Marchant, who is the Victorian branch president of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. It says:

Through the consultation meetings we were led to believe that the above issues were already set in stone and as such are non-negotiable. If this is the case the proposed system will not be of any real value to doctors and pharmacists but another administrative process that brings no improvement in patient care or public safety.

I advise the minister that these concerns are real and concern the lives of the individuals we are talking about. I ask the minister to help stop this epidemic, stop the suffering and stop the loss. We need a comprehensive real-time prescription monitoring scheme up and running as soon as possible, and I ask the minister to make the commitment to deliver that scheme for Victorian families.

Eastern Health MRI licence

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Health, and it regards the federal licensing for an MRI machine which is currently underway for the premises being built at Maroondah Hospital. I had a discussion with the leaders of Eastern Health recently about what the licensing means to its MRI service when it is up and running as far as Medicare entitlements are concerned. This is a very important provision that Eastern Health needs. Currently it has patients who are sometimes kept in hospital a day longer while they are waiting for appointments at a private MRI facility, because of the wait as far as the Medicare rebate goes.

The action I seek from the minister is that she lobby her federal counterpart when a round of licences are released — early next year is our understanding — and engage with her federal counterpart so that the federal process would look kindly on the application by Eastern Health for a licence for this important piece of equipment. That would be much appreciated.

Yarrowonga ambulance services

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and it is regarding the Yarrowonga District Hospital's ambulance patient intake policy and the availability of ambulance services in Yarrowonga. I have recently been advised that the Yarrowonga hospital has a permanent policy not to take patients who present by ambulance between 11.00 p.m. and 7.00 a.m. daily. My request of the minister is that she either provide

increased service capacity for the Yarrowonga hospital to be able to take patients who present by ambulance between 11.00 p.m. and 7.00 a.m. daily or provide an additional Yarrowonga-based ambulance crew to service the Yarrowonga district overnight.

Concerns have been raised with me that between the hours of 11.00 p.m. and 7.00 a.m. ambulance patients in Yarrowonga must be transported to Wangaratta hospital — approximately 40 minutes away — because the Yarrowonga hospital will not take patients presenting by ambulance between these hours. However, patients who present at the Yarrowonga hospital independent of ambulances during these hours are treated at the hospital.

The Yarrowonga ambulance service is comprised of two day crews and one on-call crew on the night shift. The presence of only one night shift crew means that if the Yarrowonga paramedics need to transfer a patient to Wangaratta, Yarrowonga is left without quick-response local ambulance coverage and backup crews need to be called from Cobram about 25 minutes away, Numurkah about 45 minutes away or Wangaratta about 40 minutes away. Requiring neighbouring services to provide backup support for Yarrowonga puts additional pressure on the ambulance services of these townships, as well as leaving these communities with an ambulance shortage themselves.

The problem is further complicated because of the Yarrowonga night shift being an on-call crew. Paramedics may have worked during the day and have then taken the ambulance home for an on-call shift. This can mean that a couple of call-outs lead to the crew being unavailable due to fatigue. This is again placing additional pressure on the Cobram, Numurkah and Wangaratta services, as they are required to back up more often in Yarrowonga.

This issue is likely to increase over the coming holiday period, as thousands of holiday-makers head to country Victoria and the Murray River townships to enjoy the summer, particularly water activities on the Murray River and Yarrowonga Weir. Not only will Yarrowonga be busier, but all the services that support gaps in Yarrowonga will be struggling to cope with their own additional workloads, let alone the backup in Yarrowonga. This will add further pressure on already stretched hospital and ambulance services.

My request of the minister is that she either provide increased service capacity for the Yarrowonga hospital to be able to take patients who present by ambulance between 11.00 p.m. and 7.00 a.m. daily or provide an additional Yarrowonga-based ambulance crew to service the Yarrowonga district overnight.

Port Campbell bus services

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport. The action I request is that she commit to extending the Camperdown–Timboon bus service to Port Campbell. Buses are an essential service for small towns in regional Victoria. For long-suffering residents, if bus services exist at all they are the only form of public transport available. Buses also provide access to jobs and education and develop stronger and more interconnected communities. Buses are also vital for football and netball clubs, surf lifesaving clubs, country women's associations, men's sheds and other arts, cultural, sporting and social organisations.

Port Campbell is a small township of about 700 people and is between Warrnambool and Cape Otway. Currently to get from Port Campbell to Colac, Geelong or Melbourne, residents must travel 65 kilometres west to Warrnambool, alight and connect with services travelling east. There is a northward bus service, but this stops at Timboon, only 17 kilometres from Port Campbell. Extending this bus service would save Port Campbell residents up to 2 hours on their travel time to Melbourne.

After a community campaign to extend the bus network, Public Transport Victoria committed to the extension. However, according to reports in the *Warrnambool Standard*, Public Transport Victoria has now reversed its support for the proposal. Port Campbell residents demand that this service be extended. I call on the Minister for Public Transport to commit to this small extension to the Camperdown–Timboon bus service.

Dan Murphy's

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and the action I seek is an immediate investigation of the current sales practice of Christmas gift vouchers by Dan Murphy's to see if it meets the consumer protection test.

It would seem we now have another Dodgy Dan in Victoria — Dodgy Dan Murphy's — which promises gifts but delivers spin. Dan Murphy's sent me an email congratulating me on being hand-picked to be in the running to win a \$500 gift card. All I had to do was answer three questions, and it would send the gift card to me. I duly complied like a mug punter, only to find that just allowed me to enter to win the card. I then had to ring a number to get a pin number to answer some

simple questions. Realising I had been set up, I thought I would continue on to see where it all ends up.

I was asked a question, so I answered it, only to be told, 'Just one more'. There was another question, which I answered — 'Nearly there!'. This was followed by another question, which I answered — 'Just a few more!'. This went on for approximately 15 minutes, during which I answered approximately 32 questions.

It was at this time that I smelt a rat and decided to search through the small print to see who was to be the beneficiary of this scam. Surprise, surprise! There in the small print was information that in order for you to be successful you had to answer 100 questions consecutively and successfully. Only then would you be in the mix for a gift. The real rub was that the call was being charged at \$3.40 per minute by a telco carrier.

It took me 15 minutes to answer 32 questions, so 100 successful answers could take over 45 minutes at a cost to the consumer of \$153, with no guarantee of success. It was at this time that I bailed out and decided to use this contribution to warn others. The winner is Dan Murphy's and the telco; the loser is the customer. Happy Christmas, Dan Murphy's. I hope you get your just deserts for this Christmas scam.

Level crossings

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Public Transport. Last week the government announced that it has fast-tracked the removal of four dangerous level crossings in Victoria: one on the Melton Highway in Sydenham and others in Dandenong South, Lyndhurst and Williamstown North. Our government gave a commitment to the Victorian people at the last election to remove 50 of the state's worst level crossings. This announcement is just another example of the government understanding the urgency of this and getting on with it. The announcement of these additional four crossing removals means that by the 2018 election a total of 20 crossings will have been removed, with a further 11 under construction, making us well on the way to removing all 50 by 2022.

I am personally very pleased that the government has escalated the removal of the Melton Highway level crossing as my office has received numerous complaints about the gridlock on Melton Highway during peak times. There have also been complaints of gridlock on weekends, when families are trying to take their children to local sporting activities or to access Watergardens, the local shopping precinct. The removal

of this crossing not only is pivotal to enhancing the safety of pedestrians but also will address future growth within the area in coming years.

It is expected that an additional 30 000 dwellings will be built within the area. Without this upgrade, safety and congestion will only get worse. Level crossings in the west have been holding back residents for years. Finally, within the first year of this Labor government construction has begun on the Furlong Road and St Albans level crossings, both of which have proven to be deadly in the past. Now the Melton Highway can be added to this list. I ask the minister when the construction on the Melton Highway level crossing will commence and when the removal of the crossing is expected to be completed.

Drug driving

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police. As the community and all members in this place know, the issue of taking illicit drugs is a major concern in our community. In particular I think the community is rightly concerned about the impact of ice. This flows through to people who are drug driving, or driving while impaired by or under the effect of illicit drugs. This has been unfortunately demonstrated through the road toll and the amount of road trauma being caused by those who are affected by drugs while driving. I have raised this issue before in this place through a 90-second statement. This evening I raise the issue of the level of drug driver testing for the attention of the Minister for Police by way of my adjournment matter.

By way of background, as Minister Noonan would be aware, in the 2014–15 budget the former government increased funding to raise the number of drivers tested for drugs from 42 000 to 100 000 per annum. I understand on advice from Victoria Police that this target has been achieved, which is very good news. I congratulate Victoria Police on achieving that significant expansion.

However, I have had feedback in recent times from members of Victoria Police and members of the community more broadly as I have travelled around Victoria about only highway patrol officers being able to undertake drug-driving tests. Drug users — particularly drug users in regional areas, where no highway patrol may be specifically located — know that ordinary police members are unable to conduct drug tests and that therefore they may be able to get away with drug driving.

Whilst the increase to 100 000 tests per year has been a significant advance, with the impact drug drivers are having on road trauma in Victoria it is time for the government to take it to the next level and increase the number of sworn members who can perform these tests. The number of tests conducted annually also needs to be increased. The action I seek from the minister is that he provide the necessary resources to Victoria Police to enable that to occur.

V/Line wi-fi provision

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — It is great that you are in the chair as an independent member, Acting President Ramsay, because my adjournment matter follows on from a matter that both you and Mr Morris raised in the adjournment debate last night. It aims to address the rot peddled in those contributions in relation to wi-fi and black spots.

It is the case that the coalition government made a commitment to remove black spots and introduce wi-fi on V/Locity trains — which represents only 75 per cent of passenger trips. The vast majority of passenger rail services in my electorate are not V/Locity services. But as it turns out this so-called commitment was a hoax. It was no more than a thought bubble. There was no business case. It was a number plucked from the air put against a promise that of course sounds appealing. Further, this empty promise could not have been implemented by relying on the federal government's mobile black spot program, under which rail corridors are not eligible for black spot funding.

While I know the opposition wants it to be so, it is not possible to deliver both a good wi-fi service and mobile coverage with the \$40 million set aside by the previous government. I am not sure if anyone has explained to Mr Ramsay, Mr Morris and others that the coalition would not have been able to deliver what it said it would. If not, it would be appropriate — —

Mr O'Donohue — On a point of order, Acting President, Ms Symes is delivering a setpiece speech critiquing the opposition. That is not the purpose of the adjournment debate. The purpose of the adjournment is to allow members to raise matters for the attention of particular ministers.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Before Mr Dalidakis speaks on the point of order, I ask Ms Symes if she called for an action at the beginning of her speech.

Ms SYMES — No.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — I ask if she is seeking an action from the minister.

Ms SYMES — Of course.

Mr Dalidakis — On the point of order, Acting President, it is somewhat churlish of Mr O'Donohue to talk about reading a set speech. The President in his rulings has previously said that in relation to short, timed speeches, such as adjournment matters and members statements, he will allow members to read from a prepared statement. Furthermore, the member has indicated that she is in fact calling for the action of a minister. Just like Mr O'Donohue, she wishes to provide a fair degree of information — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! We do not want a debate. I confirm that the President has in the past called members out on set speeches. The President has also raised concerns about members raising adjournment matters where they criticise other political parties. The adjournment debate is for members to seek an action from a minister, not to criticise either the opposition or the government of the day. Ms Symes has been critical of contributions from other members in this chamber. The adjournment debate is here for her to seek action from a minister on a particular issue. I ask Ms Symes to confine her contribution to seeking an action from a minister in relation to a particular matter she wishes to have addressed.

Ms SYMES — On the point of order, Acting President, in relation to referring to comments made by other members of this chamber, that is the pivotal point of the adjournment matter I am raising. It is directly relevant to the action I am seeking, because my adjournment matter is about addressing misinformation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! We will hear the context.

Ms SYMES — As I was explaining in relation to the comments that have been made and the misinformation that is out there, it is important for those opposite to avail themselves of a briefing from Mr Dalidakis, so that they are clear on the facts. If they are clear on the facts and they continue to deceive — —

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, Acting President, the adjournment debate is about a member raising an issue in their electorate and seeking that a minister take action on that issue. It is not about attacking opposition members for contributions they made last night and asking the minister to brief opposition members, which is where this is heading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I have already made a ruling in relation to this. I am going to allow Ms Symes to finish. If I find that she has breached my ruling, I will refer it to the President.

Ms SYMES — Picking up where I left off, the Andrews government came to office and after receiving expert analysis was advised that mobile coverage for all passengers on all train services is an affordable and superior policy outcome, far more superior than something that cannot be delivered, which is what those opposite said that they would deliver. Last night we were asked where the \$40 million is going. I can say that \$21 million in funding is going towards 120 mobile towers across Victoria to reduce black spots.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms SYMES — I am getting accurate information on the record for my constituents. The minister also recently announced that \$18 million will go to fix mobile black spots along our rail corridors. Due to the misinformation from the Liberals and The Nationals, it is important that the minister visit my electorate. I would specifically like him to come to Seymour station and explain to my constituents the reality of Labor's regional rail connectivity project and dispel the myths that opposition members here and in the other chamber are spreading as misinformation.

Autism services

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Education, and it concerns some major worries that I have about education funding for children with autism in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It has been brought to my attention that there have been some significant funding cuts at the Western Autistic School, resulting in a subsequent increase in costs for certain educational services.

One letter has been brought to my attention. It reads:

My son William amongst many other high-functioning children attend programs run by the Western Autistic School at both the Niddrie and Laverton campuses. Parents have recently been informed that due to funding the Tuesday arts program is being cut completely. This program offers children a break from mainstream school as well as supports their learning, socially and within the community. It facilitates and supports the children in learning how to function in the community by doing some shopping, borrowing books from the library and so on. The children also participate in cooking, art, learning social skills as well as getting a much-needed break from mainstream school (a lot of these children receive no funding and so rely on this break). There is no fee for the arts program. On Saturdays the school runs a social skills program for three different age groups. The parents have just been informed that there will be a fee increase from \$40 per term to \$211 per term.

Under any circumstances one can see that the rise in fees is way beyond the CPI. I am also hearing stories of cuts with regard to the Jennings Street Autism School in Laverton. This is a very disturbing thing indeed.

Labor has a very sad track record with autistic education in the western suburbs, and I ask the minister to address these cuts to ensure that children do not miss out on these much-needed programs. I am sure — at least I am hopeful — that the minister will be aware that these social programs in particular are crucially important for children with autism. They very much shape their future and how they will cope with life. I ask the minister to investigate the matters that I have raised and restore the funding that has been cut from these areas.

Kingswood Golf Club site

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The matter that I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Planning and is in relation to matters that have been raised with me again by Save Kingswood Golf Course, a cross-party community group of residents in Dingley Village. The residents are concerned about the purchase of the Kingswood Golf Course by ISPT for the sum of \$125 million, obviously in anticipation of a great return if the government is able to rezone it, no doubt, for medium and high-density housing. The value of the golf course is worth nowhere near that in terms of a financial return. However, its value as open space needs to be addressed, particularly some of the environmental issues of concern. According to the ISPT board web page:

The ISPT board is responsible for providing strategic leadership to the business which delivers value to our investors.

Of course the local community is concerned about the loss of precious environmental values. For example, there are thousands of trees that have been planted over a long period along the golf course, and they attract literally thousands of birds. The ISPT board held an information session, promoting the removal of the Kingswood Golf Course's special use zone to be replaced by a residential zone. As part of this proposal it is the ambition of the developers to remove thousands of trees on site, effectively devastating the environmental value of this precious asset, which is located in the heart of Dingley Village and is within 25 kilometres of the Melbourne CBD.

Given that such an action will destroy and displace local bird populations, for which Dingley Village is known, I am calling on the Minister for Planning to work with the Kingston City Council to prevent the

destruction of the trees and vegetation by introducing a robust vegetation protection overlay on the site. This will protect local bird populations as well as thousands of trees which, if the action is not taken, will be removed. Having looked at some of the plans, it is certainly evident that all but a handful of trees would be removed, and this is following years of planting trees by the golf course and by the community.

The Kingswood Golf Club is a haven. It would be an absolute devastation to see it subjected to medium and high-density housing. Dingley Village does not have the infrastructure — and certainly no school capacity — to absorb at least 1000 additional houses, which has been advertised as the target by the developers.

North Road, Ormond, level crossing

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. I have raised previously in the house a number of issues that have been of concern to local residents and traders in relation to the removal of the North Road level crossing in Ormond. I know that the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, who is in the house this evening, is well aware of the issue I am speaking about. Again it concerns the proposed lift in Cadby Avenue.

Traders and others have approached the member for Bentleigh in the Legislative Assembly, Mr Staikos, to say they are quite unhappy with the way the consultation process has been undertaken; it appears that it has been rushed through. It seems from the plans for this particular item that the lift I am referring to is an access point to platform 3 on the station. Due to the location of the lift, extensive changes have been made to Cadby Avenue whereby parking has been permanently removed and the street is now a one-way street, coming from the east and entering North Road, with no capacity for parking at all.

The lack of parking for traders, who once relied on the ability of their customers to park in Cadby Avenue, walk around the corner and undertake their business, is of enormous concern. Not only is that access point a concern but there is also a safety issue around it, being the only point of access to platform 3. According to the plan there is no stairwell near the lift, nor anywhere close by.

The action I seek from the minister is that she immediately ask the level crossing authority to review the plans to see if there is a need for a lift at this particular point, because it is clearly causing a range of

issues for traders who are concerned about their ongoing ability to operate their businesses and who feel their futures are at risk. If the lift is going ahead, could the level crossing authority provide assurances that in the event of an emergency there is an ability for commuters to easily evacuate that area of the platform to a safe area on the street?

Ouyen recreational lake

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water; however, it may also come under the portfolio of the Minister for Sport. It has to do with the Ouyen lake. Ouyen has been without a lake for many years, and over the last 10 or so years Ouyen Inc., a self-led group of leaders within the community, has been pushing to turn the old water storage into a recreational lake.

Many stakeholders have been very supportive of this project along the way. The Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Corporation has been fully supportive. Together with all of the allocations of water in the northern Mallee region it has allocated the amount that is going to be required to keep topping up the recreational lake through the various pipelines. The pipeline has already been connected to the lake, and that is a major part of the cost.

The coalition government invested \$500 000 through the Putting Locals First program — matched by local contributions — to work with the community to increase the facilities and amenities around the lake so that once there is water in the lake they would be able to provide the shelters, the barbeques and all the other facilities that are needed. There is going to be a meeting in Ouyen on 22 December where Ouyen Inc. or the management associated with the lake project are going to outline to the locals what the lie of the land currently is. This is because a great deal of work has already been done by locals in relation to resourcing and financing, and other groups such as the council, the City of Mildura, are right behind this project as well. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the government to get behind this project. It is a transformational project, and doing it in a town such as Ouyen that has such a rich history is very important.

The asbestos that was present in the dam walls to the north has been removed, and that is all ready to go. A philanthropic engineering excavation company was going to do a large part of this work for only cost recovery, but apparently it is no longer in a position to be able to do that work. Therefore there is going to be a need for the government to get behind this project and

give this community the resources it needs so that it will end up with a recreational lake on the edge of the town that will transform the town of Ouyen. We need the minister to go to that meeting on 22 December or send her representative.

Responses

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — In the adjournment debate tonight Ms Wooldridge had an item for the Minister for Health in relation to real-time health data, Mr Leane for the Minister for Health in relation to federal magnetic resonance imaging licensing and Ms Lovell for the Minister for Health regarding ambulance policy for Yarrowonga. Ms Dunn had a matter for the Minister for Public Transport concerning buses between Camperdown and Timboon; Mr Ramsay for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation regarding Dan Murphy's gift cards; Mr Eideh for the Minister for Public Transport in relation to the Melton level crossing; and Mr O'Donohue for the Minister for Police regarding drug driver testing.

Ms Symes had a matter for me, and I am happy to discharge this adjournment matter by agreeing to work with the member to find a time to visit the train station at Seymour as requested. Mr Finn had a matter for the Minister for Education regarding funding for children with autism; Mrs Peulich for the Minister for Planning in relation to the Kingswood Golf Club; Ms Crozier for the Minister for Public Transport, opposing a lift for disabled and mobility-affected individuals at the North Road level crossing; and Mr Drum in relation to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water regarding Ouyen lake.

Ms Wooldridge — On a point of order, Acting President, can I just clarify the wording used by the minister when referring to my adjournment item. The correct term is 'real-time prescription monitoring', which is quite different from 'real-time health data', which was the subject of a bill introduced in the lower house.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am happy for *Hansard* to reflect that change.

Mr Drum — On a point of order, President, I ask the minister to look at my adjournment matter to see whether it is best suited to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, the Minister for Sport or the Minister for Regional Development. It is an interesting project to create a recreational lake in a dam that does not actually work at the moment.

Mr DALIDAKIS — What I am happy to indicate is that, should the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water not to be the appropriate minister, I will forward it to the appropriate minister at that point.

I have written responses to adjournment debate matters raised by Mr Purcell on 16 September, Mr Drum on 10 November, Mr Eideh on 11 November, Mr Davis on 24 November and, finally, Mr Eideh on 26 November.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I want to comment on some toing and froing in the house when Mr Ramsay was in the chair. I think his action was appropriate in terms of listening to a complete adjournment matter in that circumstance, rather than entertaining points of order that might have truncated the matter. Ms Symes put a valid proposition to the minister in terms of seeking an action. I indicate, though, that there were elements in Ms Symes's contribution that arguably were debate. It is clearly fair for a member to reflect on information that is perhaps in the public domain that they do not believe is accurate, and in Ms Symes's case I think she was trying to seek greater clarity on some of the information that is in the marketplace that other members had referred to. In my view that is allowable in the adjournment debate, but not to the extent that it actually becomes debate.

The adjournment debate is a misnamed debate in some ways, because it is about seeking an action from a minister, usually with regard to an issue within a member's electorate or more broadly in Victoria, particularly for those who have shadow portfolios, so it is not a debate as such. Members will be aware that I often indicate that I do not want to hear setpiece speeches that are basically press releases, already prepared, that at the end just have a tag to legitimise a press release. In the same context, perhaps if Ms Symes were to revisit the matter, she might well deliver it a little differently. It did move into an area of debate, although I appreciate that she was giving context for the action she sought.

On that basis, the house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.31 p.m.

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Responses are incorporated in the form provided to Hansard

Lost Dogs Home

Question asked by: Ms Pennicuik
Directed to: Minister for Agriculture
Asked on: 8 December 2015
RESPONSE:

Earlier this year my department issued me with a report on an investigation undertaken in January 2015 into the compliance of all Lost Dogs Home facilities with the mandatory Code of practice for the management of dogs and cats in shelters and pounds Revision 1. The report indicated several non-compliances with Lost Dogs Home facilities at North Melbourne, Cranbourne and Echuca.

Each facility was issued with an independent work plan of actions required to correct non-compliances in conjunction with the registering local government authority. The Lost Dogs Home agreed to all work plans and put in place interim animal welfare measures to ameliorate concerns where facilities upgrades were required.

Department officers have audited the Lost Dogs Home at North Melbourne twice since February 2015. The most recent audit was conducted on 11 November 2015.

I received formal advice this week that, to date, the Lost Dogs Home have completed all tasks to correct minor non-compliances under the work plan. I understand that work on major structural upgrades, such as resealing flooring in dog pens and fixing drainage issues, is expected to be completed in early in 2016.

The department is next scheduled to audit the facilities in March 2016, with an estimated final inspection in September of 2016.

Concerns or complaints about the conduct of veterinary practitioners, including the appropriate use of sedatives, are most appropriately directed to the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria.

The Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria provides registration of veterinary practitioners and conducts investigations into the professional conduct and fitness to practise of registered veterinary practitioners.

The mission of the Board is to ensure access to veterinary services of an appropriate standard, delivered by veterinary practitioners acting in accordance with appropriate standards of professional conduct through the effective and efficient administration of the Veterinary Practice Act 1997.

VicForests

Question asked by: Ms Dunn
Directed to: Minister for Agriculture
Asked on: 8 December 2015
RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

VicForests Annual Report and Financial Statements are fully compliant with the relevant legislation, Treasury directions and Australian Accounting Standards. The Acting Victorian Auditor-General found that VicForests' 2014-15 financial report was compliant with these strict standards. Under these strict accounting conditions VicForests is not required to report on carbon or water values.

The question suggests that VicForests' timber harvesting activities result only in losses in environmental values. However, VicForests harvesting activities are not deforestation or permanent land clearing. VicForests is obliged to regenerate all areas that it harvests to the original forest cover. VicForests obligation to regenerate harvested areas is independently audited and publicly reported.

Harvested timber is converted to products that provide for the long-term storage of carbon. Their replacement, regeneration forests, rapidly absorb carbon from the atmosphere. Mature and old growth forests store substantial amounts of carbon but there remains the ever present risk to all forests from bushfires.

Two significant United Nations bodies, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have investigated the role of sustainable forest management and carbon. Both are of the view that sustainable forest management for wood products may actually be one of the most effective ways to sustainable offset carbon emissions.

Fonterra

Question asked by: Mr Drum
Directed to: Minister for Regional Development
Asked on: 8 December 2015
RESPONSE:

The Andrews Labor Government has attracted and secured a \$120 million investment by one of the world's leading dairy producers and manufacturers. The Government has worked closely with Fonterra Australia to attract and facilitate the investment, securing the overall project.

Fonterra will expand its major cheese manufacturing facility, safeguarding 120 existing jobs and generating an additional 30 jobs. The expansion project is a major vote of confidence in regional Victoria and its booming dairy industry.

It will also bring additional economic benefits with some 75 construction jobs during the 18 month building and commissioning phases, representing \$10 million in wages and salaries.

Through the \$500 million Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, Labor is supporting projects across regional and rural Victoria that will build critical infrastructure, create jobs, invest in communities and support new and emerging industries.

In providing financial assistance to attract investment to Victoria, the Government works on the principles of securing projects for the least cost, and demonstrating value for money for the State based on the economic outcomes that a project produces.

The extent of Government support for individual projects remains confidential to ensure expectations or benchmarks are not set for government investments. This is critical to maximising the level of private investment in projects that might receive government support.

This is a process that has been followed by both the current and former government.

The Member will note grants awarded by the former Liberal-Nationals Government to Australian Paper (announced by former Minister for Regional and Rural Development, The Hon. Peter Ryan MLA, in October 2012); Cotton On (announced by former Premier, The Hon. Ted Baillieu MLA, in November 2012); GrainCorp (announced by former Minister for State Development, The Hon. Peter Ryan MLA, in February 2014); and Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (announced by former Premier, The Hon. Dr Denis Napthine MLA, in October 2014). These grants were all confidential and the contribution by the State was and remains undisclosed.

I hope that the Member would support this major investment which increases the economic viability of Stanhope and the associated dairy farming sector into the future.