

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 21 June 2017

(Extract from book 12)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

The ministry

(from 10 November 2016)

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Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Hartland, Ms Mikakos, Mr O’Sullivan, 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 Barber, Mr Bourman, #Ms Dunn, Mr Eideh, Mr Finn, Mr Gepp, Ms Hartland, Mr Leane, #Mr Melhem, Mr Ondarchie, Mr O’Sullivan and #Mr Rich-Phillips.

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

Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues — #Mr Barber, #Ms Crozier, #Mr Elasmr, Ms Fitzherbert, #Ms Hartland, Mr Morris, Mr Mulino, Ms Patten, Mrs Peulich, #Mr Rich-Phillips, Mr Somyurek, Ms Springle and Ms Symes.

participating members

Legislative Council select committees

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

Fire Services Bill Select Committee — Ms Hartland, Ms Lovell, Mr Melhem, Mr Mulino, Mr O’Sullivan, Mr Rich Phillips, Ms Shing and Mr Young.

Joint committees

Accountability and Oversight Committee — (*Council*): Mr O’Sullivan, 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 Elasmr and Mr Melhem. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Garrett 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 O’Sullivan, Mr Ramsay and Mr Young. (*Assembly*): Mr J. Bull, Ms Halfpenny, Mr Richardson and Mr Riordan.

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

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*): Ms Patten, Ms Pennicuik and Ms Shing. (*Assembly*): Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Morris, Mr Pearson, Mr T. Smith, Ms Staley 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

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FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Deputy President:

Mr K. EIDEH

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The Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS

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Mr L. B. O'SULLIVAN

Leader of the Greens:

Mr G. BARBER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Barber, Mr Gregory John	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Morris, Mr Joshua	Western Victoria	LP
Bath, Ms Melina ²	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Mulino, Mr Daniel	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ¹	Eastern Victoria	Nats
Carling-Jenkins, Dr Rachel	Western Metropolitan	DLP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	O'Sullivan, Luke Bartholomew ⁴	Northern Victoria	Nats
Dalla-Riva, Mr Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Patten, Ms Fiona	Northern Metropolitan	ASP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Pennicuik, Ms Susan Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	Greens
Drum, Mr Damian Kevin ³	Northern Victoria	Nats	Peulich, Mrs Inga	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Dunn, Ms Samantha	Eastern Metropolitan	Greens	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Eideh, Mr Khalil M.	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Purcell, Mr James	Western Victoria	V1LJ
Elasmarr, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Ramsay, Mr Simon	Western Victoria	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Fitzherbert, Ms Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Gepp, Mr Mark ⁶	Northern Victoria	ALP	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 ⁵	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	SFFP
Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP			

² Appointed 15 April 2015

³ Resigned 27 May 2016

⁵ Resigned 6 April 2017

⁶ Appointed 7 June 2017

¹ Resigned 25 February 2015

⁴ Appointed 12 October 2016

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

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Wednesday, 21 June 2017

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

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE**Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Bill 2017**

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture), pursuant to standing order 23.30, presented government response.

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Report on Managing Victoria's Public Housing, June 2017 (*Ordered to be published*).

Professional Standards Act 2003 — Instrument pursuant to section 14 of the act amending the Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand Professional Standards Scheme, dated 15 June 2017.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rules Nos. 36 and 40.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS**Child and family services**

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is progressing the *Roadmap for Reform* and transforming the child and family services sector from a crisis intervention to a prevention and early intervention response. Last week I was delighted to meet with over 200 stakeholders across the service sector to reflect on the achievements of the road map thus far and to focus our attention on the next steps. It was wonderful to report on the development and commencement of trials of new evidence-based families' and children's programs — programs like professionalised foster care that are already operating and showing positive signs of improved outcomes for children and young people.

I was also proud to announce \$29.2 million statewide for Child First and integrated family services to work with more than 2000 additional families at risk of becoming involved with child protection or out-of-home care. This funding also includes \$5.1 million to trial and evaluate evidence-based

programs that improve capability and child safety through a statewide submission process, which will open next month. Our government is committed to evidence-based approaches to reform, and this is why I also launched the Children and Families Research Strategy. This is supported by \$800 000 to improve collaboration between practitioners and researchers in the sector to create their own data and evidence base. This will ensure that our community service organisations do not just continue with the same practices that they have used for years but innovate and try programs that have a strong body of evidence behind them. We need to do what works.

In addition the newly created Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network — OPEN — to be operated by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare will develop a Victorian-specific list of evidence-based programs and data for our community sector to draw upon. The Andrews Labor government are working with the community sector to do what works in order to ensure that vulnerable families are better supported much earlier so that every Victorian child has the best start in life and the best chance to reach their full potential.

Horticulture Innovation Fund

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I rise to update the house on two projects recently funded from the Horticulture Innovation Fund. The first concerns the Cobram and District Fruitgrowers Association, which I am pleased to announce today will be awarded a \$50 000 grant to conduct research on the habits of Queensland fruit fly during the winter months and how the pest can be better targeted during this period. The funding will be used to implement a local grid in the Cobram fruit-growing area. The grid will provide substantive evidence that the current fruit fly management methods are successful. The evidence will then be used to validate export trade requirements. The Cobram and District Fruitgrowers Association's project aligns with the statewide Goulburn Valley task force and the Cobram and District Fruitgrowers Association's fruit fly action plans, and they are to be commended for their efforts.

The second grant from the Horticulture Innovation Fund relates to an initiative from pest management company InSense. I am pleased to announce that I have approved funding for \$49 000 for InSense — another Cobram-based company. This project is about trialling calcium carbonate spray at leaf fall to increase winter chill accumulation in cherries, apples and almonds. Climate change is a serious concern to growers of deciduous fruit and nut crops in Australia. A

fundamental component of these deciduous crops is to accumulate sufficient chill and then to have a period of warmth to enable normal fruit bud development, flowering and fruit set. The funding will be used to conduct a feasibility study to determine if spraying cherry, almond and apple trees with calcium carbonate at leaf fall increases winter chill accumulation by reflecting heat from the fruit buds during the winter.

The funding for both of these projects has been provided from the \$1 million Horticulture Innovation Fund, which was a key election commitment of our government. Victoria's horticulture industry is worth \$2.4 billion a year and is underpinned by a well-deserved reputation for providing premium quality, safe and clean products. It is projects like the two that I am pleased to announce today that keep that horticulture industry strong and keep exports growing at such a rapid rate.

Holmesglen TAFE student hub

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Training and Skills) — I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's investment in Victoria's TAFE system and in particular the Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. Last Thursday I had the pleasure of joining the member for Bentleigh in the Legislative Assembly, Nick Staikos, to officially open the new \$8 million state-of-the-art student hub at Holmesglen Institute's Moorabbin campus. The hub features student support and information services, meeting and conference spaces for industry training collaboration and open-plan learning spaces with the latest technology, including interactive LCD screens.

The student hub is located between the TAFE and the recently opened Holmesglen Private Hospital, making it accessible for both students at the TAFE and the hospital. The hospital is a partnership between Holmesglen Institute and Healthscope, which offers general surgery and emergency services and provides clinical training for students in nursing, physiotherapy and allied health.

Earlier this year Holmesglen received \$12 million from the Stronger TAFE Fund. The fund is part of Skills First, which is allowing TAFEs to focus on what they do best: train students. Through Skills First the Labor government is overhauling Victoria's training and TAFE system, guaranteeing funding to secure the future of TAFE and making sure Victorians have the right skills for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Labor's record investment in Victoria's TAFE and training system is rebuilding and growing our public TAFE institutes to better position them to provide the

high-quality training necessary so that people can access great careers. This is changing the lives of everyday Victorians while also making sure industry has the skills it needs for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

Beyond the Bell

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — I would like to take this opportunity to update the house about a recently funded initiative from the 2017–18 Victorian budget, the Beyond the Bell program. Young people from the Great South Coast region will continue to benefit from greater educational opportunities thanks to Beyond the Bell.

I can announce today that the Andrews government is providing new funding of \$1.05 million over three years for the operational costs of the program as a result of priorities raised through the Great South Coast regional partnership last year and the advocacy of Ms Tierney and Mr Purcell. Today we provide certainty for the Beyond the Bell program, which has long been looking for financial assurance to sustain the important work that it does. This region has identified accessible quality education and training as a priority, and Beyond the Bell is a perfect example of how this may be achieved.

The Great South Coast regional partnership is working with the local community to shape a positive future for their region. Beyond the Bell is an initiative that seeks to lead a cultural shift in the way regional communities and service providers work to support young people in the Great South Coast region. It aims to improve young people's chances of attaining year 12 or equivalent, something that has been a persistent challenge for the south-west, and to help them transition successfully into the next phase of their lives.

The Great South Coast regional partnership has advocated for continuing funding for Beyond the Bell, as has Mr Purcell, who has had many discussions with me directly, and Ms Tierney. Our government has listened and responded. A number of regional partnership priorities were addressed through the 2017–18 state budget across the areas of education, transport and digital connectivity, with funding to address a number of specific priorities in the regional development portfolio as well.

The regional partnership model gives regional Victorians a clearer path to government decision-making and a stronger voice in government by ensuring all ministerial portfolios are addressing rural and regional issues. Regional assemblies play a key role

in enabling regional partnerships to consult face to face on local priorities before directing them straight into the heart of government. They start again next week.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Gippsland Tech School

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — I rise today to congratulate the many members of the Gippsland Tech School steering committee, who in the last 18 months have come together on a regular basis to provide the very best local input in relation to the development of the new Gippsland Tech School. We turned the sod on Friday, and the site will be developed and constructed by Becon Constructions, which has confirmed that the majority of the people working on this particular project — just adjacent to the new high-tech innovation precinct in Morwell — will in fact be from the Latrobe Valley.

This is a really important signifier of the investment that has been made not just in new infrastructure that the entire community can benefit from now and into the future but also in the jobs it creates as part of the construction. So to Gary Van Driel, Mick Murphy, Paul Ford, John Freeman, Rob Juratowitch, Byron Fiske, Karen Bird, Wayne Bass, Joel Blythman, David Brooks, Brett Windsor, Terry Harrington, Karen Cain, Jim Crisp, Debra Cerasa, Jackson Long, Simon Hamilton, Jonathan Davis and Theresa Paxino, thank you so much for the work that you have put in to make this tech school a reality as far as construction beginning.

Lillico Men's Shed

Ms SHING — I would like to congratulate the Lillico Men's Shed on getting to the point where they are ready to enjoy new premises and facilities. This is a group which provides an enormous amount of support to the West Gippsland community, to men and to the communities that they are part of. I wish them well in their future endeavours and successes, and I trust that today's opening celebration will be well attended.

Jane Goodall

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Last Friday night my goddaughter, Emily, who has just completed a degree in zoology and animal science, and I went to hear Dr Jane Goodall speak in Melbourne. Jane Goodall is a hero of ours and of the thousands of people who were there to hear her speak and the millions of people all over the world who support and work for her many conservation programs.

Dr Goodall spoke about her childhood in the UK — how her father gave her a toy chimpanzee called Jubilee in honour of a chimpanzee born in London zoo and how her mother always nurtured and encouraged her interest in and love for animals and her ambition to become a scientist, specifically to study chimpanzees in Africa and write books about them, which of course she has done, documenting their behaviour and social relationships from her close observation of them for 57 years now.

It was Jane Goodall who in 1960 observed chimpanzees making and using tools, which until then had been thought to be the preserve of human beings. Forty years ago she established the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), which supports the ongoing work of the Gombe Stream National Park and the protection of chimpanzees and their habitats.

Roots & Shoots is one of the best known of the JGI programs. It runs in countries all around the world, and it encourages young people to get involved in projects to help people, animals and the environment. Jane spoke about the magic of nature and the threats that are facing us, particularly climate change and habitat loss, which is threatening so many species, including chimpanzees. She spoke about hope for the future, which is her key message.

Kievan Van Dyke-Goodman

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — This week I have the pleasure of hosting Kievan Van Dyke-Goodman, a year 10 student from Fitzroy High School, in my office for work experience. Fitzroy High School has an innovative approach to learning, with very flexible classes and 'advisory' time, where students, under their own direction, catch up on work or work collaboratively. There is also a strong focus on engaging motivational speakers on a range of topics to provide a perspective from outside the classroom that other schools do not often enjoy.

The flexibility is fantastic, but Kievan tells me that there are still challenges, particularly in ensuring structured and consistent sex education. He also tells me that true drug harm minimisation strategies are lacking, with a 'Just say no' message being the only one that he and other students receive. He would like to change that. I thank Kievan and I hope he is enjoying his time here.

Koorie Youth Council

Ms PATTEN — Last week I got to attend the Koorie Youth Council and was very pleased to be part of the Ricci Marks Awards, which recognise youth Aboriginal leadership. I would just like to congratulate Natasha Reid, who won the Rising Star Award; Tahlia Biggs, who won a Ricci Marks Award; and Zoey Marks, who also won a Ricci Marks Award. These are three wonderful women who I am sure we will see in high places soon.

Geoff Torney

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — This morning I would like to acknowledge Mr Geoff Torney, like Mr Morris did yesterday. Geoff was a leader of the Ballarat community, the legal fraternity, the racing industry and the Catholic community. He passed away last week. For all his achievements Geoff was a man of great integrity and great humility. I feel extremely lucky to have known Geoff for the last 25 years, and my condolences go to his wonderful wife, Janet, their five children and 14 grandchildren. He is an example to all of us of how to contribute to the local community and the wider community.

Norm Joseph

Mr O'DONOHUE — I also wish to acknowledge the passing of Norm Joseph, who served our country in Darwin, New Guinea, Morotai and Borneo during World War II. He was a great community contributor, a member of the Cardinia shire Australia Day committee and a former president of the Pakenham RSL. He was presented with the Paul Harris Fellowship Award from Rotary Australia for his community service. My sympathies to his wife, Zoe, his two daughters and their families.

Mehdi Ahmadi and Jared Copey

Mr O'DONOHUE — Finally, I would like to wish Mehdi Ahmadi of Pakenham Secondary College and Jared Copey of Emerald Secondary College all the best as they will soon walk the Kokoda Track. Their trip is being funded by the Harold Bould Memorial Award, a scholarship to honour Harold Bould, who died on Kokoda, and to engender and work with future leaders of the Cardinia shire community. Mr Ahmadi is a refugee; his family are refugees from Afghanistan. Great credit to him and his family, as well as to Mr Copey, on their success, and I wish them all the best as they walk Kokoda.

Culturally and linguistically diverse renting project

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to commend the Andrews Labor government and Consumer Affairs Victoria on the launch of the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) renting project. I represented the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, the Honourable Marlene Kairouz, at the project's launch on Monday, 19 June. The launch was held in the offices of the hardworking Western Community Legal Centre, WEst Justice, who have thrown their support behind this worthwhile project.

The CALD renting project involves a number of multilingual, easy-to-understand videos to explain the rights and responsibilities of tenants in Victoria. This will provide an invaluable resource to new Australians from non-English-speaking backgrounds, empowering them to navigate the difficulties of the rental process. Consumer Affairs Victoria has ensured that the videos have been translated into the languages of the top five countries of birth for new Victorian migrants. These languages are Dari for the Afghani communities, Arabic for the Syrian and Iraqi communities, Karen for the communities of Myanmar and Swahili for the Congolese communities.

Many of these newly arrived families have spent large portions of their lives in refugee camps, where accommodation has likely been in the form of temporary shelter. This does not provide a contract, conditions, repairs or reports. Our regulatory system is already incredibly difficult to understand, and many of these new migrants simply do not know where to begin. These migrants are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Language barriers can lead to some people inevitably breaking contracts, struggling to fulfil the requirements of a lease or entering into fraudulent arrangements with dodgy landlords.

West Gate tunnel project

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — The environment effects statement (EES) for the proposed West Gate tunnel indicates that yet again cycling infrastructure has been an afterthought on a major infrastructure project. The EES shows that a 2-kilometre veloway will be suspended between six lanes of traffic, with another nine lanes below. Fumes will flow into the veloway from all sides. Cyclists will be subjected to high levels of toxic gases and dangerous ultrafine particles that cause lung cancer, cardiopulmonary disease, asthma, stroke and cognitive impairment.

The parading of the veloway design front and centre in the West Gate tunnel's promotional material as well as the EES is a blatant attempt at greenwashing a toll road that will do nothing but fill Melbourne's streets with even more traffic. Bicycle Network has been complicit in this design process. When its own members pointed out errors in the design, it put out a media release and criticised them for 'glancing' at what is claimed were 'early-stage designs'. This is completely at odds with the EES documentation, which notes that this design is near final. Bicycle Network should be ashamed of itself for being involved in the design of such shoddy infrastructure, let alone having such poor regard for its own membership and Melbourne's cycling community at large.

The Greens will continue to advocate for investment in useable, well-designed cycling infrastructure and for this to be complemented by minimum passing distance laws. In contrast, the Andrews government has shown that it does not care for cyclists or their safety.

Murrumbeena police station

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I want to make comment today about crime in the Assembly electorate of Oakleigh. The crime figures clearly show there is a significant problem. Monash has had an 18.2 per cent increase in crime since the government changed in 2014, and there has been a 45.2 per cent increase in Glen Eira.

The coalition has been campaigning to see the Murrumbeena police station reopened. What is important here is that a section of the sky rail will be built there. There is a crime hot spot in and around Murrumbeena. That is a very important station. We have made a financial commitment and a commitment that we will, if elected in 2018, make sure that that station is refurbished and reopened with uniformed police.

What I see in an adjournment response from the Minister for Police is an admission — finally — that the Murrumbeena police station was vacated by Victoria Police in 2005 when uniformed staff were transferred to the Caulfield police station. The admission that has come out of the Minister for Police's own mouth is that Labor stripped the police from Murrumbeena. Mr Dimopoulos in the Legislative Assembly has been weak on this; he has been hopeless in fighting for his community. He allowed sky rail to go through and now he is going soft on crime and soft on fighting for his community —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Davis, this is a bit of a replay of what happened last night. You are referring to members in another place and referring to their — —

Mr DAVIS — Characteristics.

An honourable member — I would not say that was very responsible.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Nor would I. Mr Davis, you know that the only way to refer to a member in the context of where you were going with both the adjournment item last night and today in this members statement is by way of a substantive motion. It is just not acceptable to be describing, as you say, the 'characteristics' of a member in the way that you are.

Mr DAVIS — Labor is soft on crime. Labor's members across this state will not stand up for their local communities, and it is very clear that in the case of the Murrumbeena police station Labor stripped the police out. The Liberals will put the police back.

Wine industry

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — Today I want to use my members statement to talk about one of my favourite topics, and that would be wine. Last week my colleague and friend the Minister for Agriculture announced the wine industry development strategy and also opened round 2 of the Wine Growth Fund. The strategy is structured around four key platforms which address adapting to business and production challenges; increasing tourist numbers and expenditure in Victorian wine regions, many of them in northern Victoria, I must say; developing profitable and sustainable export markets; and increasing industry coordination. The second round of the Wine Growth Fund will see a total of \$893 000 provided to the wine industry across the state, and grants will align with the industry priorities that I have just outlined.

Rutherglen Winery Walkabout

Ms SYMES — That was a great segue to tell the house about a lovely day that I had in Rutherglen last weekend, where I participated in the polli grape stomp. In a close contest I nudged out Indigo mayor Jenny O'Connor, National Party identity Marty Corbooy and federal member for Indi Cathy McGowan by 100 millilitres of juice. This is an annual event in Rutherglen and organised by Apex Rutherglen in conjunction with a former member of the Assembly Ken Jasper. It coincides with the fantastic Rutherglen Winery Walkabout. A shout-out also to Campbells Wines and Pfeiffer Wines. Pfeiffer Wines were

absolutely pumping in Rutherglen that weekend with thousands of people enjoying the quality wine on offer in the region of northern Victoria.

Commercial passenger vehicle industry

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — The Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan, is continuing to let down taxi licence holders, including those in my electorate. In recent months I have been contacted by a number of concerned local licence-holders who tell me that their lives have been upended by the government's mishandling of the ridesharing-taxi industry issue and the Fairness Fund. I recently raised in Parliament the plight of one particular licence-holder, Henning Rasmussen. I outlined to the minister the dire situation Mr Rasmussen and his wife, Martine, now find themselves in, including that they are facing bankruptcy.

The minister's response to my adjournment matter was appalling and utterly disrespectful to my constituents and any other licence-holders in similar situations. I raised a genuine concern on behalf of a taxi operator who is in significant difficulty and is relying on handouts to survive day to day. Rather than showing compassion and outlining what she will do to assist Mr Rasmussen in his situation, the minister instead gave me an appallingly political answer wherein she just lauded the legislation her government has before the Parliament and attempted to drag comments made by the shadow minister into the fray and took them out of context.

The minister needs to stop playing political games and take ownership of the situation without resorting to political attacks on the opposition or taking comments out of context for political gain. There are real people who are really hurting because of her incompetence in handling this situation. It is time Jacinta Allan acted like a minister by taking responsibility and providing some assistance to facilitate taxi families speaking with the Fairness Fund so that they know where they stand.

Ramadan

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I had the honour of attending the Premier's iftar dinner on Thursday, 15 June. As members of this house will know, iftar is the breaking of the day-long fast during the holy month of Ramadan observed by Muslims. This iftar dinner was well attended by parliamentary colleagues, leaders of Islamic groups, as well as members of the community, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The tradition of iftar and sharing the breaking of the fast with others symbolises unity and

respect. It is about coming together to experience the tradition and culture of others. This is crucial to maintaining social cohesion in our multicultural state.

Victoria boasts a very culturally diverse community, and events such as iftar dinners help bring people of all backgrounds together to foster understanding of traditions, create peace and create harmony. These events show solidarity with Muslims in Victoria and help to show the significance of the Muslim community, which has played a valuable role in contributing to the wider Victorian community.

It was a great event, and I thank all who were involved in organising this iftar dinner and creating an opportunity for the community to come together and share Muslim traditions during Ramadan. The end of this week will mark the completion of fasting and the celebration of Eid. I wish everyone, and especially the Islamic community, a happy Eid.

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union secretary

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — Images of Daniel Andrews proudly wearing a hard hat with a CFMEU sticker blazoned all over it are a reminder for all Victorians of those close ties that he has with the union.

Mr Finn — They own him.

Ms CROZIER — They do own him, Mr Finn. Daniel Andrews has had hundreds of thousands of dollars donated to the Labor Party, and it is an indication of how he came to power. I refer to some of the intimidatory and outrageous remarks made by union boss John Setka yesterday:

Let me give a dire warning to the ABCC inspectors: be careful what you do.

...

You know what we're going to do? We're going to expose them all.

We will lobby their neighbourhoods. We will tell them who lives in that house. What he does for a living, or she. We will go to their local football club. We will go to the local shopping centre.

They will not be able to show their faces anywhere. Their kids will be ashamed of who their parents are ...

Daniel Andrews has been silent on these shocking and outrageous remarks. He should be condemning these intimidatory, bullying remarks, but he has got far too many close ties with people who undertake these bullying behaviours, like Peter Marshall, John Setka

and others. All of those Labor MPs who have close ties with the CFMEU should be calling this out for what it is — bullying and intimidatory behaviour — and it should not be accepted by any one of the government's members.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (RAMMING OF POLICE VEHICLES) BILL 2017

Statement of compatibility

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

I table the following statement in accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 ('charter act'). I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Crimes Amendment (Ramming of Police Vehicles) Bill 2017 ('the bill').

In my opinion, the bill, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the bill

The bill creates a new offence of ramming a police vehicle. The bill provides for a two-year statutory minimum and a 10-year maximum jail term for those who commit this new offence, with any term of imprisonment to be served cumulatively, not concurrently.

Charter rights that are potentially relevant to the bill

Protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment (section 10)

In my opinion, the bill does not limit these charter act rights. The proposed amendments introduce appropriate sentences to effectively deter the serious crime of ramming a police vehicle.

The bill amends the Sentencing Act 1991 to introduce a statutory minimum sentence for adult offenders found guilty of ramming a police vehicle.

In my opinion, the statutory minimum sentence introduced by the bill does not limit the protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment, as it does not compel the imposition of a grossly disproportionate sentence.

In addition, the terms of the new offence that carries a presumptive minimum sentence are clear and therefore do not engage the charter's right against arbitrary detention.

The bill contains safeguards that protect against the imposition of a sentence of imprisonment that is inappropriate, unjust or disproportionate, including the availability of full sentencing discretion where a court is satisfied of the existence of a special reason in relation to an offender or the particular circumstances of a case as set out in section 10A of the Sentencing Act 1991.

Therefore, in my opinion, these amendments do not limit the right set out in section 10.

Right to a fair trial (section 24)

Section 24 of the charter act provides that a person charged with an offence has the right to have the charge decided by an independent and impartial court after a fair hearing.

While the bill prescribes the minimum sentence for adults for the offences of ramming a police vehicle, the court has discretion to impose any sentence within the parameters of the minimum and maximum sentences.

Furthermore, as outlined above, clause 4 of the bill aligns the statutory minimum sentencing provisions with those in the Sentencing Act 1991, for other offences, such that limited exemptions apply as set out in section 10A.

I therefore conclude that the bill is compatible with the rights set out in the charter act.

I consider that if there are any limitations of charter rights, those limitations would be reasonable and demonstrably justified pursuant to section 7(2) of the charter act.

Hon. E. J. O'Donohue
Member for Eastern Victoria Region

Second reading

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Crimes Amendment (Ramming of Police Vehicles) Bill 2017 is to create a new criminal offence for the ramming of a police vehicle.

Victorians are extremely lucky to have such a dedicated police force made of men and women committed to protecting the community and upholding the law.

However, with the rising crime Victoria has experienced over the last two and a half years, our police are under attack like never before.

In an alarming trend, more and more offenders who seek to evade police are ramming police vehicles with little regard for the serious danger posed.

In the 2015–16 financial year 14 officers were hurt as a result of a police vehicle ramming, and if the trend continues, lives will continue to be put at risk.

The number of police vehicles rammed has more than tripled under Daniel Andrews, increasing from 30 in 2013–14 to 103 in 2015–16 and to more than 115 so far in 2016–17.

This trend is not confined to metropolitan Melbourne, with recent ramming incidents in Warrnambool and Ballarat.

This must be stopped and offenders given the punishment they deserve and that the community expects.

Unfortunately current penalties are failing to deliver the deterrence needed. As Police Association secretary, Wayne Gatt, has said:

Legislative amendment is needed now to send the strongest possible message to offenders that if you threaten or assault a police officer, or engage in behaviour like this then you are going to have plenty of time to reflect on it from a prison cell.

Despite the clear risk to police, the increasing number of rammings and the calls to action, Daniel Andrews refuses to act.

In the absence of leadership from the Andrews government, I introduce this legislation on behalf of the Liberal-Nationals coalition to ensure there is a strong deterrent to these offenders.

The bill provides for a two-year statutory minimum and 10-year maximum jail term for those who commit the new offence of ramming a police vehicle, with any term of imprisonment to be served cumulatively, not concurrently.

As legislators the least we can do is provide our hardworking police men and women the support they need as they confront the crime wave facing Victoria.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 5 July.

FIRE SERVICES

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That —

- (1) a select committee of eight members be appointed to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 31 August 2017, on the restructuring of Victoria's fire services as contemplated by the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 and, in particular, the —
 - (a) impact on fire service delivery across Victoria;
 - (b) effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery;

- (c) short-term and long-term cost impact on fire service provision;
- (d) underlying policy rationale;
- (2) the committee will consist of three members from the government party nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Council, three members from the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Council, one member from the Greens nominated by the Leader of the Greens in the Council, and one member from among the remaining members in the Council nominated jointly by minority groups and Independent members;
- (3) the members will be appointed by lodgement of the names with the President no later than 12.00 p.m. on the day following the day on which this resolution is agreed to by the Council;
- (4) the first meeting of the committee must be held no later than 14 days after the day on which this resolution is agreed to by the Council;
- (5) the committee may proceed to the despatch of business notwithstanding that all members have not been appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy;
- (6) one half of the members appointed pursuant to paragraph (3) will constitute a quorum of the committee;
- (7) the chair of the committee will be a non-government member and the deputy chair will be a government member;
- (8) in addition to exercising a deliberative vote, when votes on a question are equally divided, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, shall have a casting vote;
- (9) the committee may commission persons to investigate and report to the committee on any aspects of its inquiry;
- (10) the presentation of a report or interim report of the committee will not be deemed to terminate the committee's appointment, powers or functions; and
- (11) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders and sessional orders or practices of the Council will have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing or sessional orders or practices of the Council.

The purpose of this motion before the house this morning is to create an opportunity for public scrutiny and parliamentary scrutiny of the government's proposal with respect to fire services. This issue has been one of great contemplation by the Victorian community and indeed the Victorian government over a period of almost two and a half years. It is an issue which started with the need for an enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) to be reached between the government and the United Firefighters Union (UFU) in the order of two years ago.

It is a fairly rudimentary function of government — the negotiating of EBAs with various public sector workforces — and that is something which is always on foot with government; there are always EBAs that need negotiating. Since those first EBA negotiations we have seen that rudimentary negotiation grow into something which has come to dominate the government's time, dominate public debate and lead to great concern within the Victorian community as to the direction the government is now proposing to go in respect of fire services.

From those early days of EBA negotiations, which started with the government not supporting the EBA terms which were proposed by the UFU, we saw in relatively short order the government, certainly as articulated by the Premier, change its position from one of sticking to the government's then wages policy and industrial relations policy around EBAs and rejecting the claims that were being made by the UFU to quite dramatically become one of supporting the position put by the UFU following the Premier's intervention. We saw in the months that followed that intervention very significant divisions within the government over this issue, given the fact that the Premier had shifted the government's position from one of maintaining its position on industrial relations and wages policy to one of supporting the UFU's claims, which put the responsible minister, the Minister for Emergency Services, at odds with the government's position.

Initially the responsible minister and the Premier had been as one on the government's position. Yet following the involvement of the Premier in the matter, the Premier and therefore the government took a different position, and the responsible minister found herself dramatically and publicly at odds with the government. Frankly, it is quite unprecedented to see the level of public division within a cabinet over an issue such as this.

Subsequently, as we saw and as is typically the case with these types of things that are liable to occur, the head of government prevailed and the minister gave way and resigned. But around that we also saw enormous concerns raised by the parties that would be subject to the EBA, which the Premier had indicated the government would support. We saw concerns raised by the Country Fire Authority (CFA). We saw the CFA's then chief executive resign. We saw the board members subsequently lose their positions when a new minister was appointed. We have seen the resignation of the CFA chief officer. We have seen the resignation of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) chief officer, deputy chief officer, chief executive and acting chief officer, and we have seen impacts on the MFB board.

Contrary to its original position we saw the government and the Premier shift their view very strongly in favour of the UFU's EBA position. We saw the Premier lose his own minister over that, and we have subsequently seen the loss of a substantial number of senior officers from the fire services as a consequence of the Premier adopting a position which was supportive of the UFU's claim.

As time moved on we saw the government and the Premier indicate that they were committed to implementing that claim from the UFU. We saw the commonwealth Parliament legislate to ensure that the rights of volunteers in organisations like the CFA were protected and given regard to, which is something that already exists in fact within the CFA legislation, as an amendment was put in place by the previous coalition government to ensure that the roles of volunteers were reflected and respected in decisions that the government of the day made.

Notwithstanding that, the commonwealth legislated through the Fair Work Act 2009 — the commonwealth industrial relations framework — to require the impacts of agreements such as that which was proposed by the UFU and endorsed by the Premier to have regard to the impact on volunteers and for the Fair Work Commission to be mindful of those impacts. As a consequence the government was unable to proceed and has not proceeded to date with that UFU EBA position.

As the internal disagreement within government continued around this issue and as internal concerns in the fire services continued around this issue we saw several weeks ago the government announce a new position, which is the position articulated in the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. What this bill seeks to do is essentially turn Victoria's fire services on their head — to completely restructure the way in which our fire services operate and the way in which fire services are provided for metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria and country Victoria in a way that we have not ever seen in this state.

This restructure, as articulated in the bill, has essentially come from nowhere. There has not been a policy rationale put forward as to why this restructure is occurring or as to why this decision has been made. It has become evident that there was little, if any, consultation undertaken by the government prior to its decision to introduce this legislation seeking to impose this model.

One of the possible outcomes of this model is that it would facilitate the government reaching that UFU EBA position which the Premier has committed to deliver. Not surprisingly that has raised the question in the community as to whether this restructure is designed simply to deliver on that EBA outcome rather than to promote better fire service delivery in Victoria. This has been an extraordinary policy pathway the government has taken. It has gone from what was originally a fairly rudimentary EBA negotiation into something that a year ago the Premier told us was settled — ‘Time to move on’ — to what has now been a piece of legislation introduced on short notice, seemingly with limited or no consultation, designed to completely restructure the fire services in Victoria.

What I am proposing this morning is that this proposed restructure should be the subject of a discrete select committee inquiry. The key elements of the proposed inquiry are set out in paragraph (1) of the motion, which to recap, requires the committee to inquire into, consider and report — and we have nominated the end of August as a reporting date for that — on the restructuring of Victoria’s fire services as contemplated by the Firefighters’ Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. In particular, it is to look at the impact of fire service delivery across Victoria — that is: what is this restructure going to mean for fire services across our state?

Since this bill was first tabled in the other place there have been a number of public campaigns about what the bill is going to mean for fire service delivery. The timing of some of those campaigns has been interesting, particularly the television and the social media campaign which has been led by the UFU, because that campaign was in the public domain almost as soon as the bill. That certainly raises the question of whether the UFU was perhaps the only party or one of the few parties that may have been consulted about this legislation such that they were in a position to have a public campaign on the legislation as soon as it was released, because no other party seemed to have been in a position to run a campaign on this legislation from the day it became a public document.

The UFU, in their campaign, have essentially sought to suggest that those areas of Melbourne that are currently covered by the Country Fire Authority volunteer stations, which are largely the outer suburbs of Melbourne, are receiving a lesser level of protection from fire services. This is something that has caused great concern in those communities which are covered by CFA volunteer stations and has also been particularly damaging to the morale and enthusiasm of

the volunteers that man those volunteer stations and indeed that have been recognised across the state and over decades as having provided an exemplary service for Victoria.

Among key things this inquiry needs to look at are the claims that have been made by the UFU as to what this legislation is going to mean to the provision of fire services across Victoria, and what the interaction is going to be between the role of paid firefighters in integrated stations and the role of volunteers in service delivery, particularly picking up the issue that has been raised by the UFU of volunteer service provision somehow being suboptimal in outer metropolitan areas versus Metropolitan Fire Brigade paid firefighter service provision in the middle and inner suburbs.

Of course, if this legislation is to be supported by this Parliament, the Parliament needs to have confidence that the restructure contemplated by this legislation does at a minimum maintain the service delivery we are currently receiving from our two primary fire services, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Authority — but of course there are Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning firefighters as well — and will not diminish that fire service delivery, be it in inner metropolitan areas, be it in regional and country areas or be it in the outer suburban areas, where perhaps the greatest change is potentially going to arise from this proposed legislation.

The second element of the motion is to look at the effect of the proposed restructure on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery. Volunteers are the backbone of Victoria’s fire services. From the early 20th century, Victoria has relied upon a strong, committed volunteer fire service to provide coverage across much of Victoria. Yes, in metropolitan areas, in some regional centres and in some of the outer suburban areas we have a combination of MFB paid firefighters and CFA paid firefighters at dedicated stations, but for the vast majority of Victoria, on a geographic basis fire service provision has been through volunteers, and in major incidents where surge capacity has been required, the availability of volunteers has been critical and remains critical to this day.

Over the last 100 years we have seen in Victoria a number of significant fire events which have been successfully suppressed, relying upon the work and commitment of volunteer firefighters. Of course the most recent very large-scale event was the Black Saturday fires of 2009, a catastrophic event. Prior to that on a catastrophic level we had the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires, the suppression of which was

also heavily reliant upon the work of volunteer firefighters. If we go back to the 1939 fires in Victoria, again the availability of large-scale volunteer firefighting capacity was critical to those incidents being successfully suppressed.

It is not only in firefighting that our volunteer firefighters are critical. The participation of volunteer firefighters in our communities in other ways, be it other sorts of incident support outside of direct firefighting or be it community participation in charity and fundraising events for local communities, has been critical over generations. People who are volunteer firefighters are typically people who are heavily engaged in their communities and active in supporting them. That means that ensuring our volunteer firefighters are supported, respected and valued publicly by their government and the fire services they are associated with is incredibly important to ensuring they remain strong contributors to our community. Therefore legislation such as the bill the government has introduced in the last month, which seeks to deliver a fundamental restructure of our fire services and in doing so would potentially have an enormous impact on volunteers as firefighters and therefore on volunteers' ongoing engagement in firefighting and potentially elsewhere in community activity, is something that the Parliament needs to consider very closely. The Parliament needs to be confident that our fire services will not be undermined by the legislative framework that is being proposed by the government in the bill before the house this week.

That is something that is absolutely critical. It is something that has been evident since this saga began two years ago with the initial EBA negotiations, and it has continued over the last two years through the various iterations the government has been through in attempting to implement that agreement. Volunteer firefighters are concerned about what that agreement is going to mean for their activities as volunteer firefighters and their ongoing participation as volunteer firefighters and about what that is going to mean for service delivery to the community. Notwithstanding the fact that this has been an ongoing issue for a period of over two years, those concerns have not been addressed; those concerns have not been satisfied.

Certainly this side of the house believes that satisfying those concerns of volunteers — being able to reassure them that their service is valued and being able to reassure them that their service will be able to continue under this model — is critical to the fire services model Victoria adopts in the future. Therefore item (1)(b) of the terms of reference proposed by this motion is geared specifically at looking at those volunteer issues

and at not only being able to provide assurance to volunteer firefighters that that would be the case under this model but also being able to provide assurance to members of this house who ultimately will need to vote on this legislation that it would be in the interests of volunteer firefighters and in the interests of maintaining their engagement and participation in service delivery. That is very much an unanswered question. It is very much a question around which there is widespread concern in the community and widespread concern among volunteers.

The third element of the terms of reference relates to the short-term and long-term cost impact on fire services provision. This is also an important term of reference, and it arises from the government's proposal that as part of this legislative package the fire services property levy be frozen for two years. That actually raises a lot of questions.

The fire services property levy was introduced in 2014 as a means of improving the effectiveness and indeed the equity of funding for Victoria's fire services. The fire services property levy provides the majority of the funding for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and for the Country Fire Authority. Prior to 2014 there was a levy imposed on insurance contracts on buildings, and the basis for that levy was basically the view that an insurer was a beneficiary of a fire service. If you were an insurer of a building that was not destroyed by virtue of a fire service attending, you as an insurer were the beneficiary, and therefore it was appropriate for the state to impose a levy on the insurance policy that you wrote to insure that building. That was the basis on which we had in Victoria over many decades come to impose a fire services levy on insurance contracts on buildings — on properties.

The problem with that was that not every building or property was insured, but there is not unreasonably an expectation in the community that where a fire occurs at a property or a building, fire services will respond — be it in the metropolitan area with the MFB, be it in country areas or outer metro areas with the CFA. At no point, certainly in modern times, would you expect a fire service to turn up at a property and seek to ascertain whether a fire services insurance levy had been paid before they put the fire out. We had a situation where, through the historic construction that insurance was a reasonable basis to fund our fire service because insurance companies were the beneficiaries, some property owners were paying for fire services because they were insured and property owners who chose not to insure their properties were paying nothing for fire services but of course would be the beneficiary of a fire

service if they had the unfortunate occurrence of needing fire services on their property.

In 2014 the previous government chose to restructure that fire services levy. The government chose to abolish it from insurance and impose it as a fire services property levy on the rate base of every property. That reform was undertaken in 2014. It was a surprisingly complex reform to shift from a levy based on however many insurance contracts might be in the marketplace in a given year to imposing a levy on each property based on the capital improved value of each property, noting of course the increase in the number of properties versus the number of properties which had been insured whilst also maintaining the distinction between properties which were covered in the MFB area and had one level of rate and those covered by CFA areas which had a different level of rate and of course within that having differential rates for commercial properties, industrial properties, residential properties et cetera. That new property-based model was actually a very complex reform to put in place, but it means that everyone who has fixed property is making a contribution to the funding of fire services in Victoria. That raises in the order of, in round figures, \$700 million a year to fund both the Country Fire Authority and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

As a consequence of the recommendations from the Black Saturday 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, both those fire services have seen a substantial increase in their subsequent budgets to allow for re-equipment and other capability changes, and that has been reflected in the fire services property levy which is the majority funding source — hypothecated funding source — for our fire services.

The government's announcement that this package they are seeking legislative support for would be accompanied by or result in a freezing of the fire services property levy for two years raises a number of questions. It raises the question of what is the actual cost impact of this structural reform. Why has it been necessary for the government to announce a freeze in that levy increase which will span the election period and take it into the next parliamentary term? If the costs of this package are reasonable and no contemporary costs have been formally put on the record, why is it necessary for the government to announce a two-year freeze — a limited freeze which spans the election period — on the fire services property levy?

That is why this term of reference seeks to understand the short-term costs which would fall within that two-year period and also the long-term costs of this restructure and the government, through this

restructure, delivering on that enterprise bargaining agreement outcome which the United Firefighters Union was seeking. One of the things we have seen with EBA negotiations in the last two years — and it was ventilated in this place in the committee stage on the Appropriation (2017–2018) Bill 2017 two weeks ago — is that the government has gone down the path of in some instances backloading agreements. The headline cost for the first two years or three years can be modest, but the ongoing cost can be significant because of escalation factors which are built into a third, fourth or subsequent year. As we saw with the nurses EBA, which effectively was committed to for two EBA periods rather than one, the back-end costs were very substantial for that agreement.

It is important for the Victorian community and it is important for this house to understand whether the government envisages or indeed has already agreed to a cost structure which would see long-term costs beyond the headline frozen fire services property levy two-year period, which would lead to a massive escalation in the cost of fire service provision and therefore a commensurate massive increase in the fire services property levy.

The fourth element of the terms of reference — (1)(d) — is the 'underlying policy rationale'. Why are we here? Why is the government doing this? There have been a number of inquiries in consideration of fire services in Victoria over the last decade. It is not clear to members on this side of the house and it is certainly not clear to the Victorian community where in that plethora of reviews it was recommended that this structural reform take place. This is a structure which has dropped seemingly from nowhere. It is a structure which was not contemplated two and a half years ago when the government started down the path of this EBA negotiation. It was not contemplated 12 months ago when the Premier said the CFA issue was solved and we could move on. It was not contemplated at the beginning of this year. Yet we have seen in the last six weeks this legislative proposal suddenly drop from nowhere, with this complete restructure of our fire services and no explanation as to the rationale. This has already led to confusion in the Victorian community. Why is this being done? What is the government seeking to achieve from it? Why has it suddenly appeared from nowhere after two and a half years of talking about the CFA in particular but also the MFB? Why has this model suddenly appeared from nowhere and what is the government seeking to do with it? That will also be a critical aspect of this inquiry.

One of the purposes of the inquiry is to give voice to those members of the community and those institutions

throughout Victoria whose voices have not been heard in this debate and who were not consulted as part of this legislative proposal coming forward. One thing that has been evident through the public discussions since this legislation was announced was that the breadth of consultation undertaken by the government was very, very narrow. It seemingly did not even include senior officers incumbent in the fire services or the emergency services hierarchy. It certainly did not extend to people such as the tens of thousands of volunteers who exist within the CFA structure here in Victoria.

The inquiry will create an opportunity for those people who are affected by this proposed structure to make their voices heard not only publicly but by the Parliament. They will be able to make their voices heard by members of the Parliament, who will need to determine the future of this legislation: whether the legislation is supported to go forward in its current form, whether the legislation is supported with amendments or whether the legislation is not supported at all. Hearing voices from those affected community groups, those volunteers and those emergency services organisations which were not party to prior consultation and hearing from the government, the Minister for Emergency Services and the former Minister for Emergency Services will all be critical to understanding the rationale for this legislative change and for the Parliament being able to determine whether it is the right way to proceed or not.

One of the other issues that has caused considerable concern in the community is the government's decision to incorporate in this legislation its proposal for firefighters' presumptive rights legislation. Presumptive rights legislation is a mechanism by which volunteer firefighters and paid firefighters who contract certain cancers in the course of their service as a firefighter are deemed to have contracted those cancers as a consequence of their firefighting activities and therefore are entitled to compensation. They are entitled either under the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013, being the WorkCover scheme for paid firefighters, or under the parallel scheme operating for volunteer firefighters, the Country Fire Authority Act 1958, which while not covered directly by WorkCover mirrors the entitlements made available through the WorkCover scheme.

That is a policy position the government committed to delivering in its first 100 days in office. The Labor Party in opposition said it would introduce presumptive rights legislation to give that deemed entitlement to compensation within the first 100 days, so the government's election commitment was that this platform would be in place by March 2015. We

actually did not see anything from the government in a legislative sense until a month ago, and it was only with this bill to completely restructure the fire services that we saw the government come forward with this presumptive rights legislation framework and tie the matters together.

In an extraordinary move the restructure of Victoria's fire services, for reasons which have never been made clear, has been tied into a bill to change the compensation structure for volunteer and paid firefighters. The two issues are so unrelated that the bill itself — the government's bill — is structured in such a way that it could be easily split in half. The compensation regime is a standalone section of the bill that has been tacked on to the structural changes. It is something that is not integral to the restructuring of the fire services. It is something which many in the community view as having been cynically attached to the restructure as an incentive, almost as a poison pill for the Parliament, to pass this legislation lest it be seen to somehow not be supportive of presumptive rights legislation.

That is something which has been very transparent in the Victorian community. It is something which has caused considerable outrage in the Victorian community, the fact the government has chosen to tie presumptive rights legislation to the restructure of the fire services. Why the government has put the bill together now, almost two and a half years after its commitment to deliver it, and why presumptive rights legislation suddenly comes forward now and in the eyes of the government has to be inextricably tied to the fire services restructure has led to enormous cynicism in the Victorian community.

The purpose of this select committee is not to go through the structure of that presumptive rights legislation model. There are different views within the community as to the appropriateness of that model and whether the compensation that is proposed for volunteer firefighters is equal to the compensation proposed for paid firefighters. The view is that it is not and that the model being proposed is different between volunteers and paid firefighters. But that is not the primary interest of this inquiry. I think there is now broad agreement across the chamber that a presumptive rights model is appropriate. That is not in contention. What is in contention is why it has suddenly come forward and been tied, as a poison pill, to a restructure of the fire services. That is something that also needs explanation from the government: why they did not deliver their commitments at 100 days, back in March 2015, as they said they would, and why the legislation has only come forward now tied to this restructure.

That is the rationale for why this inquiry is desirable now.

The government has not been able to articulate what the impact of this restructure will be on fire service delivery across Victoria. The government has not addressed the community's concerns and indeed the volunteers' concerns about what the impact of this restructure will be on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery. Its announcement that the fire services property levy is to be capped for two years raises a concern, raises a flag as to what the real cost of this restructure and the agreement which presumably would be permissible with this restructure are actually going to mean for Victorian taxpayers. Why is it necessary to announce the cap if the ongoing cost is reasonable? Why do you need to suppress the cost through the election period if the cost is reasonable? That matter needs to be addressed, as does the underlying rationale. Why are we here, and why is this restructure being proposed in this way at this time? And indeed why has it been tied to the government's presumptive rights legislation commitment now when it is convenient rather than that legislation being introduced as a standalone piece of legislation as was committed to back in 2014?

The structure for this select committee follows the standard model. It is the model that has been used by this Council since the 2014 election and a model which reflects the composition of the chamber. It is a model which has a committee of eight: three members of the government nominated by the Leader of the Government, three members of the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition, one member of the Greens nominated by the Leader of the Australian Greens and one member of the crossbench nominated from among the members of the crossbench. That reflects the composition of the house, it reflects the approach taken for the standing committees and it reflects the approach taken for a select committee which came before this house back in 2015. The coalition believes that is the appropriate model to go forward with this select committee as well.

The proposed reference nominates a reporting date of 31 August 2017. This has been done with a view to having an inquiry which allows enough time to hear the concerns of people around Victoria, to hear the concerns of volunteer groups and to hear the concerns and issues of the emergency services, their principals and other related stakeholders while still bringing the inquiry to a conclusion in a reasonable time. Of course after this week the Parliament will go into its winter recess. We believe that winter recess and the inquiry running until the end of August will allow an

appropriate window for, at this stage, the inquiry to report back and for this house to consider its recommendations.

It is not the usual practice of this house to establish select committees. In fact this is only the second select committee of this term, and where the house has established select committees it has done so in relation to significant policy and legislative issues. The last select committee established in the Council was a select committee in relation to the proposed Port of Melbourne lease, and that was a select committee process which considered the government's legislative proposal, took relevant evidence from relevant stakeholders and made recommendations, the implementation of a number of which led to a better legislative outcome. That is the potential for this select committee as well.

This is a committee which in the course of its investigation can consider the legislative proposal, can consider the views of those parties who have not been consulted to date and can come back to this Parliament with a view on whether the legislation should proceed as it is, should proceed with amendments or should not proceed at all. That is the value of the select committee process. It is one which, as I said, the Council does not embark upon regularly or lightly. It is one that the Council has employed where legislative and policy issues are significant and the impacts of those policy decisions are important to the state and have long-term implications for the state.

It is certainly the coalition's view that this proposed restructure of Victoria's fire services is something which has potentially substantial implications for Victoria. The continued engagement of our CFA volunteer base is critical to fire service delivery in this state. It is therefore the coalition's view that a select committee to consider these issues to ensure that those concerns from volunteers and others are addressed and to provide assurance to this house that the model proposed is a reasonable one is important, and therefore we strongly advocate the establishment of this select committee today to ensure that that confidence can be given to the members of the Legislative Council but also to the people of Victoria.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — I rise today to address the motion in the name of Mr Rich-Phillips, which relates to the proposed creation of a select committee to be appointed to inquire into, consider and report on the restructuring of Victoria's fire services as contemplated by a bill that has been considered by the Legislative Assembly and has passed in that place. In particular the motion puts that the select committee

should in particular focus upon the impact of fire service delivery across Victoria, the effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery, the short-term and long-term cost impact on fire service provision and the underlying policy rationale.

Mr Rich-Phillips, in speaking to this motion, has gone through the detail as to why the coalition believes that this select committee is important, and in this regard I note that there are a number of components of the reasoning that he has put in his opening remarks that warrant response and comment, and I will get to those in the course of my contribution.

He has also gone through the rationale for the composition of the committee, the select committee being the second which has been proposed within this Parliament — the first being the select committee into the proposed long-term lease of the port of Melbourne — with a process for hearing materials and evidence and a requirement that the first meeting be convened no later than 14 days after any such resolution of this nature is agreed to by the Council.

There are a couple of dates within this motion, in particular the date proposed by the motion in its current form that refers to a reporting period of no later than 31 August 2017, and I also intend to speak to that date as well. It also warrants careful consideration that through this motion we look to cast some light on what has been a very vexed and difficult issue in public policy and in relation to fire services across Victoria right back to the 1880s.

As the deputy chair of the environment and planning committee I have in fact been part of a long inquiry which received around 86 submissions and had extensive hearings in metropolitan Melbourne and in the regions to discuss the issues of fire preparedness throughout Victoria, including and in relation to equipment, technology, resourcing and capabilities as well as the issue of the best way in which implementation of recommendations from the bushfires royal commission and other inquiries can be achieved.

At the outset I would like to note that the government will be proposing amendments to the motion as it appears on the notice paper, and I would ask that those amendments now be circulated to those in the chamber.

While that is occurring I would like to address some of the issues that have arisen in relation to Mr Rich-Phillips's contribution. We have heard that as far as the coalition is concerned the issue of fire services is fraught, and in this regard the government does not disagree. This is an issue which has been

going on in relation to the creation of boundaries and borders, in relation to the allocation of resources and operational response and in relation to the issue of supporting, recognising and respecting all firefighters since the 1880s.

Since a number of rural landowners came together to defend their property, their livestock and their communities prior to the beginning of last century we have seen that the inclusion of paid firefighting staff has been a point of tension. It has been one that has inevitably created — at least in theory — challenges in relation to the various responsibilities, the obligations and the rules that apply to firefighters who respond to emergencies in the course of their jobs as paid staff of a firefighting and emergency response service on the one hand versus those who turn out or who are otherwise equipped to turn out as volunteers.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Country Fire Authority (CFA), and the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 makes that abundantly clear. The volunteer charter clearly states that the rights, roles and obligations of volunteers are central to a functioning and a well-resourced fire service throughout Victoria.

It is also important that in the course of this debate we note that volunteers need to be respected, included and provided with dignified engagement around what they need to do in their jobs in their communities. This is something that has been part of this government's approach to resourcing and its approach to understanding gaps in facilities, in training and in equipment, and the government has recognised the importance of looking at the fact that some volunteer brigades under the CFA's current boundaries are exceptionally well resourced. They have stations, vehicles, equipment and training that are excellent. Nobody is saying that that should not be the case.

However, we also see throughout the state — including in Gippsland, the area that I represent — numerous CFA brigades where the facilities and the equipment are hopelessly, woefully out of date. I have seen the proliferation of tin sheds throughout rural and regional Victoria in response to small-scale grants and allocations for some brigades. What has happened is that for all intents and purposes those tin sheds, which were erected under the former government —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms SHING — I am very pleased to take up Mr Ramsay's interjection about how that was done under the Baillieu-Napthine governments between 2010 and 2014. We see, however, that those well-resourced

stations exist in areas where there is significant population density, as opposed to Dinner Plain, as opposed to Cobungra and as opposed to Rosedale, for example, where the buildings are in the same state, are the same size and were constructed to the same specs as they were in 1970s. Firefighting, however, has changed significantly since the days of limited capacity tankers and of people signing up to volunteer from the age of five or six as part of a junior's course in training and who are still going at the ages of 70 or 75. These people are and will remain the lifeblood of many CFA brigades throughout rural and regional Victoria. Nobody disagrees that they remain key to the history, the tradition and the contribution that has been made by volunteer firefighters in the state of Victoria.

What we need, however, is a modernised fire service. We need to tackle the challenges of a number of elements that come with any prosperous state experiencing record population growth. Between now and 2050 we will see an extra 3 million people in the state of Victoria. Under the former government there were public proclamations about the additional 200 career firefighters that they would make available to the CFA. They too recognised — at least then — that providing additional firefighters was a relevant and necessary part of keeping our communities safe. What we see now, however, is a politicisation of the areas of fire services and fire services responsiveness and resourcing that has created a huge degree of upset, distress and difficulty for volunteer firefighters and for their paid career colleagues.

We see that there is very frequently a lateral move between those people who volunteer in their communities and those who then take up a job as a career firefighter. We see that these communities comprise the same people, often with familiar surnames, in parts of the world where, again, people have volunteered and made contributions far above and beyond what they might need to do for themselves and for the protection and safety of their own families in order to help those around them.

I have been to dozens of volunteer brigades where the same surname appears time and time again on the service boards and where the captains know the kids of the community and have helped train them in running and in responsiveness. I have seen, however, that these communities are changing, that the nature of risk as people move more readily throughout regional and rural Victoria is changing, that our peri-urban areas and our suburban areas are changing and that the density of our communities continues to grow. With that comes the corresponding obligation and responsibility that a good government resource those communities. It is

crucial that we have emergency services that can get to fires in time, because it is trite but nonetheless necessary to note that fires burn whether someone is responding to them or not and that we need a properly resourced fire service — —

Mr O'Sullivan — That's new!

Ms SHING — I will take up that interjection, Mr O'Sullivan. It is trite, it is self-evident, but it needs to be said nonetheless, because we need to resource our fire services so that we have additional firefighters and so that we encourage volunteers to join up and be part of the regional and rural fire services response. We need to have a fire service that provides adequate training for everybody and that provides flexibility for volunteers to be able to attend training in hours that might otherwise be difficult for them because they have jobs, because they are carers, because they are parents or because of the tyranny of distance. We need to have infrastructure, facilities and equipment that are not beholden to the casual glance of a certain government at a certain time in fulfilling need or perceived need. We need to close the gap between those fire stations which leak, which do not have disability access, which are not in fact equipped to accommodate technology and which are not in many cases equipped to even fit the tankers which are now part of a regular firefighting effort. We need to do this across the board, and we need to do it in a consistent fashion.

In this regard I note that the fire services statement and the \$100 million fund, which has been allocated towards achieving better, more equitable and more suitable resources allocations across the board, are intended to take out a lot of the delay or misinformation around the way in which resources are allocated and delivered. Not dissimilar from the way in which schools were previously built and the oversight for the construction of new schools in Victoria was the responsibility and remit of the Department of Education and Training and not dissimilar from the way that the then Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure was previously responsible for managing the oversight and removal of level crossings, this government has in fact consolidated those processes into the Victorian School Building Authority and the Level Crossing Removal Authority respectively. This has resulted in a number of outcomes which have significantly benefited the community. It has resulted, for example, in a reduction in the time taken to build new schools by an average of 37 weeks, because we no longer require the involvement of a department whose key and primary focus is properly but nonetheless in the area of delivering education. We are taking the work around infrastructure and the need to deliver better

infrastructure to all Victorians and we are putting it in the hands of a dedicated authority which can deliver consistent, high-quality and, to the best extent possible, locally constructed infrastructure which is fit for purpose.

We have seen time and time again in the fire services the way in which infrastructure and improvements have been delivered that are not up to spec. It has not been done in consultation with people in the community and it has not been done in a way that makes it useful and durable for generations to come, and that sends a really powerful message to those people who contribute within the community. It sends a message that decisions are in fact altogether about the bottom line and altogether about the divvying up of a large-scale envelope of money to go the furthest, and going the furthest depends upon whose scale you look at. It has in fact got to be about making sure that when a volunteer or career firefighter turns out to a call-out he or she is in a position to do so quickly, in a well-resourced way, in a safe way and in a way that is based on having had the right training and getting the right support.

It is the obligation of responsible government not to demonise firefighters from one camp or the other. It is the obligation of responsible government to make sure that in fact we recognise, honour, respect and ensure dignity for all firefighters who put their lives on the line — as crucial and essential as that is to this inherently risky activity or job — and that we recognise the time spent in being forever ready, the time spent in community education, the time spent in training and the time spent in building bonds at a local brigade that are crucial to being able to operate together on the fireground when a call-out is received, when major incidents arise or when firestorms occur, as we saw on Black Saturday and as we have seen right back to 1944 and the fires of 1939.

We have seen that people work together best when they have common bonds, and those common bonds are borne out in the way in which fire services decisions have been taken, to a certain extent. We have seen time and time again with inquiries, with royal commissions and with various other reviews, which include but are not limited to the royal commission, the Jones inquiry, the Cotton review, the Lewis review, the Comrie review, the Hazelwood inquiry, the Fiskville inquiry and the fire services review, that cohesiveness between people who are working together on the fireground is of paramount importance to safety. We have to make and keep our firefighters safe, and this means that we have to make sure that everybody gets the recognition and the resources that they require.

In moving to a number of the components of the motion as they have been put, I understand that amendments have now been circulated, and in this regard I would like to talk to those amendments. In paragraph 1 of the motion it is proposed that the word 'eight' be omitted and 'nine' be inserted. Given the commentary that has been flowing around fire services, given the litany of front pages that have been printed and given the thousands of stickers which adorn cars and which peel off the back windscreens of the cars of a number of people who stand in this place regularly and talk about how firefighters are important but who nonetheless believe it is okay to politicise them in any way they see fit, it is the government's view that a select committee should be comprised of nine members to include additional representation from the crossbench to inquire into this issue. In the interests of the transparency which Mr Rich-Phillips referred to in speaking to the substantive motion, it is the government's view that an additional representative on this committee from the crossbench will be in a position to hear firsthand from people around the rationale for the proposed reforms in relation to the impact on fire services delivery in Victoria, the effect on volunteer engagement and participation, and the short-term and long-term cost impact on fire service provision. Having nine members on the committee is in and of itself, if we take Mr Rich-Phillips's words at face value, a good thing according to the opposition, as it is according to the government.

In relation to the second amendment which has been put, paragraph 1 ought properly omit a reference to 31 August 2017 and in fact reflect a reporting date of not later than 8 August 2017. This is the Tuesday of the sitting week after the winter break, when Parliament resumes. When we note the intersection between the further work that is proposed to be done by the select committee and the fact that the fire season and the summer season will draw ever nearer, it is important that we support the urgent work of a committee to undertake an inquiry into the proposed terms of reference and enable that to be put to the Parliament as expeditiously as possible.

That is not to say — and I wish to head off at the pass any criticism that may arise around this — that this is a rush job. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. In establishing a select committee which would comprise, under the amendments that have been put, nine members with a view to reporting back by 8 August, it is the government's view that in fact a thorough inquiry could be undertaken with a factually based analysis of the terms of reference as they appear in paragraph 1 of the motion. This could be done from

an evidentiary basis and accurately and thoroughly to enable the select committee to report to the chamber.

We need to say also that, corresponding to the first amendment moved, we would propose to omit from paragraph (2) the second occurrence of the words 'one member' and to insert in their place 'two members'. Again that is to reflect the proposal that the overall select committee should be made up of nine members. It is not hard to see the rationale for this.

Mr Rich-Phillips has referred to the importance of transparency. This issue has been the subject of such public conjecture and public vitriol and has had such far-reaching implications for our career and volunteer firefighters across the board, that it is really important we do this in a way that includes the decision-makers and includes the elected representatives of this place as part of a final report.

The fourth component of the amendments that are moved in my name today relate to paragraph (6). They indicate that in paragraph (6) the words 'one half' should be omitted and the word 'five' inserted instead. This relates to the quorum requirements of the committee itself, and it would be a logical consequence of an increase of the total select committee representation from eight to nine.

These are, in substance, amendments to the motion which are intended to deliver on clarity, on transparency and on some certainty around where Victoria heads as far as fire services reform is concerned. Everybody is prepared to acknowledge population growth in the state, at least on a top level and at least as far as the development of other areas of policy are concerned. Most witnesses to public hearings — in fact almost all witnesses to public hearings — of the bushfire preparedness inquiry indicated that they had no objection to an additional 450 firefighters, which we promised to do and are in the process of delivering, with 350 within the CFA area and 100 within the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) area. Almost all witnesses to the fire season preparedness inquiry, in the course of many months of hearings, referred to the importance of safety on the fireground and referred to the fact that, despite the long and anguished history around fire services and response in Victoria, when push comes to shove firefighters work together on the ground.

However, despite the difficulty and the distress and the upset, despite the anecdotes heard on the ground, despite the difficulties being sustained by career firefighters, who I have been advised from people in my community are being encouraged to feel ashamed for what they do, and despite the concerns arising from

volunteer ranks that numbers will diminish, we need to establish a clear and evidentiary basis for fire services reform. We need to understand that the model being proposed, which relates to the New South Wales model, is in fact intended to grow volunteer numbers. It is intended through the proposed volunteer-only base for the CFA to give volunteers dedicated support staff who can in fact have as their primary obligation volunteer welfare, training, support and efficiency. We need to make sure that as our state grows we are in a position to take care of people who need quick responses, who deserve to be able to find a firefighter when they need them.

We need to make sure that the inherently risky work of firefighters is acknowledged, that it is done so every day and that it is done so not just in the course of making sure that firefighters are trained properly, that they have the right infrastructure or that they have facilities that can also serve as technologically equipped and accessibility assured hubs within their communities but while acknowledging the fact that there are health risks associated with fighting fires.

In this regard I note that there were comments from members of the former government around there not necessarily being a link between firefighting activities on the one hand and certain sorts of cancer on the other. That is fundamentally wrong. It is fundamentally wrong, it is fundamentally incorrect and it is fundamentally demoralising to the people who go out time and time again and expose themselves to risk and to the families of those people, who see their loved ones leave to attend a fireground, an incident or a call-out and do not know what the impact of that call-out, that turnout or that response will be on their loved one. We need to make sure that, in providing presumptive legislation, we protect and recognise firefighters by having a scheme that provides for recompense, for recognition and for compensation, and that we do so across the board.

I note in this regard that under the former government there were multiple attempts to pass presumptive legislation and that these attempts to make sure that presumptive legislation could be delivered for all firefighters were voted down by those who now claim, as Mr Rich-Phillips has, that the inclusion of presumptive legislation within this fire services reform is a poisoned pill. Mr Rich-Phillips has gone from being a member of a government that refused to vote up presumptive legislation while it was in power to now saying that in fact it is bad faith, to paraphrase his contribution, to include presumptive legislation for all firefighters as part of broader fire services reform.

What we are trying to do through this suite of reforms and what we are seeking to achieve as set out in the fire services statement and as discussed at the more than 60 meetings that have taken place since these reforms were first foreshadowed by the Premier, by the Minister for Emergency Services and by others is make sure that firefighters understand that the rationale for these changes is to benefit all firefighters, whether they are paid for such work or not.

Mr Rich-Phillips gave, in his words, no explanation as to the rationale. He then went on to ask why this was being done; why it had suddenly appeared from nowhere. That is quoting what Mr Rich-Phillips said in his contribution this morning on this motion. The fact is that when firefighters are exposed to this level of misinformation, to the indignity, to the almost daily onslaught of media coverage by people who do not themselves participate in firefighting activities and yet see fit to commentate on the value of the work being undertaken, it is crucial that we face the need for reform and that we do so in a way that benefits everybody.

When Mr Rich-Phillips asks why this is being done, the answers are borne out in the numerous inquiries that have been undertaken. Eight inquiries in the last 10 years have all found that there are fundamental problems within our fire services model in Victoria and that these problems extend to difficult relationships between management and staff, difficult relationships between career staff and volunteer staff and difficult relationships between area managers and people who are there, in the words of every firefighter I ever spoken to, to put the wet stuff on the red stuff.

We have seen time and time again that the inherently valuable and dignified work of firefighters has been used as cannon fodder for newspapers that in fact do not care for the welfare of firefighters. We have seen firefighters continue to put their lives on the line, make themselves available and give up their weekends and their free time to train others, to tell the kids about what they do and to talk about why it is a good thing to be a firefighter, all the while having the threat of yet another front page. The dozens of front pages that have appeared to date talk about why firefighting is in fact in such a mess and is irreparably broken, yet those people on the ground who turn out, those families within firefighting and those people who have those surnames that are so common across the honour boards, memorial boards and contribution and membership boards across Victoria will keep turning out. They deserve our respect and they deserve our recognition.

Firefighters deserve to have terms and conditions of employment as part of their work that recognise the need for training. They need clear terms and conditions that respect what they do. This is not dissimilar to any other emergency services worker, and in this regard the proposed model in the fire services statement makes this very clear. It seeks to in fact work along a model almost identical to that of the Chief Commissioner of Police. Fire Rescue Victoria would be headed up by a commissioner of the same nature as the police commissioner here in Victoria. This is not controversial, and yet it has been made controversial. It has been made controversial at the expense of accurate information. It has been made controversial because it suits a narrative around how things are broken in this state, which is fanciful, which lacks credibility but which, most importantly, does fundamental damage to the morale of people who put themselves out there on the line time and time again.

Consultation is something which has been discussed at length in the course of the introduction of these reforms, in the course of debate in the other place and also in Mr Rich-Phillips's contribution today. In this regard it is an interesting proposition because everybody has seen fit to contribute to the commentary that plays out in the public domain whilst in fact not necessarily committing in good faith to working around the rationale for why change is necessary.

We note that consultation has been a key part of the work that has been undertaken by this government. In fact since December last year the minister, Mr Merlino, has been chairing the CFA policy and performance consultative committee. This has as its members CFA career and volunteer firefighters; professional, technical and administrative (PTA) staff members; the CEO; the chief fire officer; the emergency management commissioner; and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning chief fire officer. They have provided really significant and valuable insights into what the CFA needs to do to modernise and to further support volunteers from the people on the ground who know it best.

I have been part of those meetings too, as Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, and they are not undertaken in a way which is intended to extract any political mileage. They are undertaken to understand where the problems and shortfalls lie, to discuss options and opportunities for fixing those problems and shortcomings and to do so. That covers a range of areas from operations and communication through to resourcing, and it should be part of the way in which emergency services are delivered across the state.

In addition, since announcing the reforms we have held more than 60 forums with Minister Merlino, the CFA chief fire officer, the emergency management commissioner, me as Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services and other ministers and senior CFA operational staff. We have also met with MFB firefighters and CFA corporate staff. In the course of the work being undertaken by government members, discussion with volunteer brigades is a really key part of the work that is necessary and appropriate to be done to understand what is needed to make sure our volunteer numbers grow.

Despite the misinformation about the way in which New South Wales saw a drop in volunteers after it reformed its fire services, and despite the fact that that statement, made by the Leader of the Opposition, was absolutely and fundamentally incorrect, that line continues to be peddled in the public domain. What we are intending to do is lift the number of volunteers and to make sure that we have as many people as possible in a position to conclude that it is a good thing to volunteer for the CFA. We want the boys and girls in our communities in rural and regional Victoria to want to be part of this, just like their parents and often their grandparents and their great-grandparents have been, because there is a huge legacy here that deserves to be honoured.

We also want terms and conditions for career firefighters which enable them to have certainty in the way they go about doing their job. This covers not just people working in metropolitan areas but also those firefighters who work across the 35 integrated stations in Victoria. Integrated stations are a curious development in the context of population growth on the one hand and boundary changes not having occurred on the other. For example, we would not consider Dandenong or Craigieburn to be country areas any longer, but they nonetheless continue to be part of the CFA for all intents and purposes in relation to the boundary issue.

We need to make sure that when and as boundaries change, there is appropriate consultation. The proposed reforms specifically take this into consideration. They refer to a panel that would in fact provide an assessment on the alignment of responsibility for a given area, with the underlying objective of preventing loss of life, preventing damage to property and infrastructure and protecting the environment. This was a recommendation from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, but no government has sought to enact it before now. In enacting this recommendation the minister, after receiving the panel's advice, must have regard to a range of factors outlined in the

legislation, including fire services capacity, budget and resource implications and the broader impact on the emergency services sector. This is necessary work as we contemplate how the state can provide an infrastructure and emergency response not just to our current population but to the additional 3 million people who will come to the state of Victoria or otherwise be born here between now and 2050.

The legislation also provides for the Governor in Council to make an order to amend the act to give effect to a ministerial determination. The panel, before providing its advice, must consult with all relevant fire services agencies and any local council directly affected by the review. In addition, as part of conducting the review the panel may consult with any person or body as it sees fit, including volunteer firefighters and their representatives.

It is proposed that the volunteer charter be enshrined in the new CFA structure and that the obligation to consult with volunteers and to make decisions which are in the best interests of volunteers continues. The proposed structural reforms are intended to provide to volunteers a sole focus within the organisation of the CFA that would be implemented by paid staff who are there to support volunteers. That would be their objective. That would be the remit by which they were seconded from Fire Rescue Victoria to the CFA.

I cannot think of an entirely volunteer organisation in emergency services that does not have paid staff. Paid staff are necessary to make sure that administrative tasks are taken care of, to make sure that grants and program submissions are drafted or submitted on time, to make sure that health and safety requirements are taken care of, to make sure that community-based activities are arranged and to make sure that people have a constant presence in the area where they volunteer their time, effort and energy. This is no different for the proposed reforms. The proposed reforms are geared towards making sure that volunteers have what they need to do the work that they do, to contribute and to make sure that they are in a position to get more resourcing, better engagement and better facilities. They are to make sure that they are able to hold on to any money they have raised through community fundraising and that they are in a position to do less tin rattling because they have better access to facilities. That is where the \$100 million fund comes in. That is why having that dedicated resource will be an important part of this work.

The reform is also about making sure that we increase the diversity within our fire services and do what we can to have better representation from the entire

community. We want our facilities to be disability friendly and accessible. We want women to participate. We want young people to get involved in volunteering, which is the lifeblood of the CFA. We need to make sure that we continue to respect that and enable that to be the case for generations to come.

It is also really important that we take this issue off the frontburner where it has been the subject of such damaging vitriol, that we look at putting away the bumper stickers, that we look at dismantling all of the political arguments that have been mounted before about why reform is or is not a good idea and that we approach this issue from a factual basis — not supposition, not commentary but fact. We have got a significant volume of material to refer to in the course of this work. As I have indicated, there have been eight reviews, inquiries and commissions over the last 10 years, all of which have found there are fundamental problems and shortcomings in Victoria's fire services system and structure.

We need to make sure that we continue to engage with stakeholders. In this regard the government has been holding ongoing discussions with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), including through the minister and departmental officials, through the emergency management commissioner and through the CFA chief officer. In fact, as the government has indicated by putting it on the record on 8 May 2017, we had a meeting with the VFBV where the minister discussed the problems facing the fire services, including industrial and cultural issues and the need for change, including considerations around structural reform. There was a further meeting with government officials following that discussion.

Further, the reforms that have been announced and that are set out in the *Fire Services Statement* and in other public commentary made to date in fact deliver on the priorities that the VFBV has expressed both in our meetings and publicly. They relate specifically to preserving the state's surge capacity, protecting the status and role of volunteers, providing further support and ensuring that career staff continue to work closely with and support volunteers. I have touched on a few of those things in the course of my contribution. Volunteers, including individual firefighters at their stations, will be closely engaged as we prioritise the expenditure of the \$100 million CFA support package.

Insofar as the issue around integrated stations goes, there have been meetings and discussions which have involved volunteers and paid staff at all of the 35 stations I referred to earlier. These meetings and discussions have also included volunteer staff from

many surrounding brigades. It has been made clear by the emergency management commissioner and the chief fire officer that in fact the model of co-location is the preferred one and that at every single integrated station transition teams will work with the people who contribute their time at those stations, whether in a paid capacity or as volunteers, to make sure that the outcome which is delivered for each of those stations is one that has the social licence from those who participate at that place.

Co-location, which is intended to mean that people can continue to work together as is overwhelmingly the case in our integrated stations, will be facilitated wherever that is desired. If, however, it is not, if volunteer brigades would like to go their own way or to have their own facilities, then that is something that will be facilitated. This is not about obstacles; this is about maintaining and building on the good things — the things that bring people together in emergency management response now and into the future.

We have had a lot of commentary on this particular issue, and it has been shrouded in conjecture, speculation, misinformation and three-word slogans for a long time now. The former government had begun negotiations with the United Firefighters Union in relation to a new CFA agreement in 2013. This is not simply an issue around industrial arrangements that has cropped up since the election of the Andrews Labor government. This is in fact an issue that has been going on for a really long time. The current enterprise negotiations have been a lightning rod for many of the cultural issues that have, as I indicated at the beginning of my contribution, been going on since the 1880s.

What we are trying to achieve in a collective agreement, what we are trying to achieve with these reforms, is the end of a war which has occupied the minds of firefighters and emergency services responders throughout Victoria for too long. It has to end, and it has to end in a way that resources everybody in a more equitable fashion and that recognises everybody's contribution in a fair and transparent way. It has to happen in a way that means that 50 years from now — I am not sure whether any of the current members of the chamber will still be here — we do not come back to this debate, we do not revisit this issue and say, 'Maybe we should have done it that way', we do not turn our minds to problems that have been contemplated for well over a century and decide that we should have done something.

Everybody recognises that the system has huge problems in an organisational, cultural and interpersonal sense. The way to fix those is to focus on

the things that people can agree are priorities, and again through the fire season preparedness inquiry everybody recognised that protection of life, protection of property and working together are the key priorities for good firefighting. We want to make sure that that is backed up with resourcing and with funding. We want to make sure that we have fair terms and conditions in an enterprise agreement for public sector workers that recognises the work that they do. We want to make sure that there is a system of presumptive rights legislation, based on the Queensland model, that delivers certainty for the people who put themselves in harm's way.

We want to make sure that there are no more divisive comments made for different or perhaps bad faith reasons — I am using my words quite selectively here — such as that the Fiskville issue might have been a beat-up or that career firefighters were not first on the scene or not anywhere to be found on Black Saturday or at the Bunyip Ridge fire. We need to make sure that there is an end to the anecdotes and the supposition from people who have not been on the fireground themselves. In doing so we need to make sure that there is a decision in place from the government and from the Parliament that reflects that. To this end, the amendments to the motion that have been proposed are intended to deliver an outcome around information, around facts and around analysis that withstands any commentary that might not be based on any of those things.

We need to make sure that when we talk to people in the course of any such inquiry by a select committee, we go to the detail of what will actually be the case around the delivery of fire services, the way in which surge capacity will be protected, the way in which presumptive legislation will operate and the way in which control on the fireground will be maintained by an incident controller and that the first arriving officer will become that controller and that any changes to this are in accordance with the operating procedures on transfer of control that apply across all of our emergency services. We need to make sure that this is not a process which becomes a political football in the same way that this issue has been for too long now. In doing so in relation to the composition of the committee, in relation to the numbers and in relation to the reporting time frames, the government proposes that this amendment would in fact be a proper and appropriate way forward.

Surge capacity is one of the really key concerns that have arisen since these reforms were proposed and since discussions back in December 2016 began. For the avoidance of any doubt, volunteers at the CFA's 1220 volunteer brigades will continue to serve their

local communities and provide vital surge capacity. Surge capacity will not be affected in any way. For example, CFA brigades in Gippsland will continue to work in their own communities, provide surge capacity for major emergencies and support their colleagues. They will be supported to do this through changes to the CFA act.

The legislation also enshrines the role of volunteers in the organisation through supporting co-location, as I indicated, of volunteer brigades in the new Fire Rescue Victoria fire district through provisions allowing certain functions to be performed and exercised by certain CFA officers within the district. I have spoken in relation to the issue of boundaries and the way in which they need to be accommodated, I have spoken in relation to volunteer assets and I have spoken in relation to volunteer numbers and the way in which we have seen a shift in volunteer numbers, which has been offset by larger changes within the volunteer support services sector. We are still above the 2016–17 target for support volunteers across the sector. That is a really important thing to understand. We will continue to have the capacity to support and protect the Victorian community. We have actually seen that volunteer numbers since 2012–13 have been relatively steady, and where there has been a slight decline on the previous year's results much of this can in fact be attributed to the CFA and the Victorian State Emergency Service being more proactive and undertaking regular engagement to make sure that volunteers on the books actually correlate to active numbers.

It is important to know that we have actual numbers turning out when and as we need them — actual people ready, willing and able to respond when and as required. In fact, we are committed to attracting and retaining volunteers. We are committed to making sure that we can value volunteers through emergency equipment programs and through the Valuing Volunteers program, and we are committed to making sure that their health, wellbeing and safety are taken care of.

In relation to the changes that have been proposed, though, it is also necessary to focus on the huge change that these reforms put onto the table for career staff. Career memorial boards and brigade boards often feature the same surnames. We see generations of firefighters coming together to work throughout their lives in the course of protecting people's safety and property. We see the enormous sacrifices they make. We know the impact on their mental health and wellbeing of consistently turning out and being required to respond to some of the most horrific conditions that

you could possibly imagine. We know that these firefighters, these brave men and women, have a legacy, a history, a tradition and a culture which relates to the insignias on their shoulders, which relates to the signage in the areas where they serve.

Whether it is the MFB or the CFA, this is a huge change for career firefighters. This is not to be taken lightly. We need to make sure that our career firefighters are managed through that process and respected through that process. We need to make sure that we accommodate population growth and we continue to have one of the best fire services in the world, because we recognise and we value the work that our career firefighters do.

It is all too easy, it is all too simple to devalue and demonise and to approach a lowest common denominator debate on firefighting services by talking about the union, by talking about Mr Marshall, by talking about integrated brigades. That has to stop. What we see is the need for change being recognised across the board. What we see is fatigue from volunteers and career firefighters, which makes it very clear that they are over this debacle. As Heyfield CFA captain Phil Graham said on Gippsland ABC radio on 15 June after the Leader of the Opposition filmed a visit to that station:

We shouldn't be used as camera time, we shouldn't be used as a political football; we should be left to run our brigades, protect our communities and basically be left in peace to do our work as best we possibly can.

As CFA district 17 operations manager Mick McGuinness said:

The general opinion across Geelong and all the Geelong brigades is they can't really see much change if any and they see the positives in modernising the fire services.

Barry, who attended a meeting in Ballarat, had this to say on ABC radio:

I was a sceptic about the CFA changes. I didn't think it was going to work, but I went to a meeting this morning in Ballarat with the minister and Craig Lapsley and Steve Warrington and a couple of others and my view has changed.

I don't think that by and large volunteers have a whole lot to worry about.

This was borne out time and time again in the evidence that was provided to the fire season preparedness inquiry. Witness after witness after witness talked about problems in morale and then went on to say that in fact it would not materially impact upon the way in which volunteer and career firefighters came together to respond to emergencies because when towns are on fire, when buildings are on fire and when people's lives

are at risk people come together and they do so in goodwill and with good faith to make and keep each other safe. This is where again we want to make sure that volunteers get what they need and that facilities and services are equipped with what they need now and into the future to attract and retain new people to the areas which will experience population growth and to make sure that ageing groups of firefighters who have spent their lives contributing to their communities are able to pass on that knowledge and that experience to others and to new generations.

In this regard I look to the amendments that have been proposed to change the reporting date to 8 August, to increase the number of members — who will in fact be volunteers — on this particular select committee and to change the quorum requirements as a consequence. On this basis I formally move the following amendments on behalf of the government:

1. In paragraph (1) omit 'eight' and insert 'nine'.
2. In paragraph (1) omit '31 August 2017' and insert '8 August 2017'.
3. In paragraph (2) omit 'one member' (where secondly occurring) and insert 'two members'.
4. In paragraph (6) omit 'one half' and insert 'five'.

I look forward to a speedy resolution of this particular issue and to the commencement of an inquiry which will hopefully make sure that we can move away from conjecture, from speculation, from commentary, from misinformation and again from the political narrative that has plagued this issue for well over 100 years and into something which enables us to deliver not just for the people of Victoria now and into the future but for the firefighters who give of their time, who work day and night and who are there consistently for Victorians in Melbourne, in outer metropolitan areas, in our regional centres and right to the very edges of our state. Thank you.

Mr O'SULLIVAN (Northern Victoria) — I wish to rise this morning to discuss the motion that is before the house that has been moved by Mr Rich-Phillips in relation to the establishment of a select committee in relation to the bill that has been put forward by the government, the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. This issue is one that has been dragging on for some time, and as has been clearly stated by Ms Shing, this is a debacle. This is an absolute debacle, and that is a real shame for everyone that is involved in this because the fire services that we have here in this state play a critical role in protecting life and property. That involves protecting the life and

property of everyone who lives in this state, and quite often it goes beyond our borders in assisting those who live across the border in other states and also in other countries, as we have seen in terms of a strike force capacity helping fellow citizens around not just Australia but the whole globe.

What this bill has brought to the debate in terms of our community is division, and that is one of the things that I am most concerned about in relation to this. As you go around the state and seek the views of people in terms of what the impacts of this legislation will be and what impacts it will have on our local communities, it is those divisions that have caused some of the biggest concerns.

It is true to say that this legislation has been rushed into the Parliament, and that is something that has really concerned volunteers — why this legislation has been rushed into the Parliament without any meaningful consultation with the people who are going to be impacted most by it. I think it is probably fair to say that a review or an inquiry into this legislation is absolutely essential. There is so much in this legislation that is not clearly understood. There is so much in this legislation that is trying to bring about an outcome which will have detrimental impacts on such organisations as the Country Fire Authority (CFA) with its 60 000 volunteers. That is 60 000 people who when it is required, when their pager goes off or when the siren goes are prepared to drop what they are doing and at all costs turn out to a fire to protect others, to protect life and to protect property. That is one of the great things of our community, and we should celebrate that. We should not denigrate that; we should not attack that.

Unfortunately what is happening with this legislation is it is bringing in a whole range of consequences for the volunteers, for the CFA and for our fire services that will have detrimental impacts, and the CFA volunteers feel threatened by it. They are very concerned by it, and they do not feel that they have had the opportunity to have their say. They do not feel that they have been consulted in terms of what the real impacts of this will be. That is one thing that this inquiry will allow to happen — for those volunteers and those people who may be impacted by this legislation to come forward and actually talk to the committee and have their say, because they have had no opportunity thus far to put up their hand and say, ‘This is what I think of this legislation. This is how it is going to impact my station’.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Hazelwood Pondage

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — My question today is for the Minister for Agriculture. Much was made about the introduction of barramundi into the Hazelwood Pondage. The reason we were going to have a potentially world-class place to catch the barra was that the Hazelwood power station was producing warm water for a species generally found in warm water. This was potentially going to attract keen fishers from all over Australia and inject much-needed tourist dollars into Gippsland. Now the power station has closed, and along with the job losses the water is no longer being warmed. I have had concerns raised about the future of the barramundi. I would like to hope that the government is keeping tabs on the investment it made in introducing the fish, so my question is: what has happened to the barramundi now the water is not being warmed?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Bourman for his question and his interest in the barramundi fishery at Hazelwood, which has been just a wonderful, wonderful thing for the Latrobe Valley. People said it could not be done, but apparently it can be. Mr Northe, a member in another place, joined Ms Shing and I for the initial release. It has been nice to see such good bipartisan support for the barramundi fishery at Hazelwood. The water is just as warm as anything; it is like stepping into a bath almost. It was quite a surprise to put my toes in the water and experience what Latrobe Valley locals have known about for a very long time — this wonderful warm spot even in the middle of winter.

When Engie announced the closure of the Hazelwood power station we were certainly concerned about the impact that it would have on the fishery. Obviously the government’s response, which is a matter of public record — and we have talked about that in this place before — is to support the community through that transition. But it did give rise to these questions about what would happen to these tropical fish in the event that the temperatures dropped, and the temperatures did drop quite a bit. We are monitoring them very closely. We have been able to relocate the barramundi to another part of the Hazelwood Pondage, where there is a naturally occurring spot of warm water as a result of an aquifer. That has been really successful. I think it has been a great credit to our team at Fisheries Victoria, and Anthony Forster has led the work on that. The monitoring will continue.

The benefits to the community have been significant — close to \$1 million in economic benefit. We had people come from the Northern Territory to Victoria to chase barra. I am reliably informed some of them are 85 centimetres or so. To use a fishing phrase, it was ‘this big’.

Ms Shing interjected.

Ms PULFORD — As Ms Shing points out, ‘approaching the magic metre’. They are much bigger now than they were when we put them in there, so they are thriving. We have been carefully managing this. They have been relocated. A number of them managed to find their way to the warm water on their own; others were literally put in nets and moved. They have very happily settled into their new home. We are monitoring the bait that is available to them so that they can continue to be well fed over the winter.

The fishery is not open to the public at the moment. I know fishers are very keen to get back into the wonderful Victorian barramundi fishery. I am hopeful that by September, when the weather warms — all things going well over the winter — the barramundi fishery can continue to have a very, very good season.

There were 20 000 people who participated in the ballot to have a boat permit for the fishery; 5000 people were successful and attended as a part of the ballot. Then there were around another 10 000 people who fished from the land. People had a wonderful, wonderful time, and it was just a terrific boost for the economy in a community which has been experiencing significant challenges and change.

Supplementary question

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I thank the minister for her answer. Given that the circumstances have obviously changed for the barramundi and given that they are not likely to breed, as I understand, because they cannot go to the ocean or some such thing, what plans are the government making for the future of barramundi in the Hazelwood Pondage?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Bourman for his supplementary question. We are monitoring closely the health and the population of the number of barramundi in the pondage and will continue to do so. We are optimistic about getting through the winter months with them all nice and warm in their new home in the waters there. Fisheries Victoria actually met yesterday with Engie, the owners of the land, who therefore have some interest and some control over access. We will continue to work with them on access. We are really hopeful that there will be

a good future for the fishery in the warmer months as we get nearer to the summer and in the long term as well.

Child protection

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Families and Children. My question relates to the permanency reforms that came into effect last year through amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Restrictions on the Making of Protection Orders) Bill 2015. During the debate on this bill the minister provided assurances that a review of permanency reforms would be undertaken, starting six months after the changes came into effect, and that the review’s outcomes would be made public. The inquiry commenced on 1 September 2016 and was undertaken by the Commission for Children and Young People. According to the commission’s website, its expected completion date was April 2017. Has the minister reviewed the report on this inquiry, and when will the report be made public?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question. The member is correct in that I did make that commitment and did in fact ask the Commission for Children and Young People to undertake this report. I am yet to receive a final report. When I do receive a final report from the commission obviously I will have more to say about the matter at that time.

Supplementary question

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her answer. So when you do receive the report, will the report go up on the website?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I will obviously have a discussion with the commission at that time. I have made a commitment to review the permanency changes put in place by the previous government and I will be talking to the commission about the appropriateness of that, but certainly that would be my expectation.

Anglesea coalmine site

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for Ms Pulford representing the Minister for Resources. Minister, the long-awaited mine rehabilitation plan for the Anglesea coalmine recently appeared on their website during a sleepy long weekend. The only thing is when you download the plan it is not actually a mine rehabilitation plan, it is a bunch of brochures telling us that they have got a

rehabilitation plan. Has the government actually received a mine rehabilitation plan from Alcoa, and if that is the case, will you release that plan?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Barber for his question. I will seek a response from Minister Noonan on that matter.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — In these same brochures they also tell us that they have done a geotechnical study, a vegetation study and a hydrology study and that these are really wonderful studies — some of them have even been peer reviewed — but we do not actually get to read those studies. If this was any other mining or major redevelopment, this comprehensive information would be released. Is the government also undertaking to release the attached technical studies, which they say demonstrate that the actual plan is feasible?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — Again, this question is a matter for the Minister for Resources. I will seek a written response from Minister Noonan for Mr Barber.

Greyhound racing

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Recently the government released a draft *Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds*. The greyhound racing industry supports the livelihoods of thousands of Victorians, and the vast majority of these are in regional Victoria. I therefore ask the minister: what impact will this code have on the viability of the greyhound racing industry?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Purcell for his question and his interest in this matter and the future of greyhound racing. The government is absolutely determined that greyhound racing in Victoria will have a strong future. That is why we have been working hard with the code for more than two years to improve animal welfare standards. Greyhound racing was on its knees in February 2015 when the *Four Corners* program broke the live baiting scandal. Our government responded quickly. We commissioned two reports, one from the racing integrity commissioner, Sal Perna, and one from the chief veterinary officer, Dr Charles Milne. One of those reports was commissioned by the Minister for Racing and the other by me. These reports were tabled in the Parliament in June 2015. There were 68 recommendations in all. A number of these were

recommendations for Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) and participants in the code to implement. Others were for the government, and we are certainly responding to and have accepted all of the recommendations that were made to us.

Recommendation 1 in the Milne report was for a new code of practice for greyhound racing. The document that has commenced a consultation phase is a draft code. This was released late last week at the request of Greyhound Racing Victoria. They sought a reasonable period of consultation, 60 days, so that there would be lots of opportunities for people to have their say along the way. But there has been some concern from some trainers about some of the issues. I think what Greyhound Racing Victoria now plans to do is to hasten that and provide their response to government much more quickly, probably within the next couple of weeks. I understand they are having the first meeting of participants in the industry in Sale as early as today and that there will be a series of other meetings occurring over the next two weeks. They will then provide feedback to our government.

I will just take the opportunity to update members on some of the consequences of the reforms that have been made to date. The number of bred litters — so the number of litters — in the 12 months to 30 June 2016 decreased from 926 to 634, with the number of pups whelped dropping by 30 per cent. The Greyhound Adoption Program achieved a record 895 adoptions in 2015–16 — they are all at Ms Shing’s place, and I think some of them are at Mr Mulino’s place. GRV do have an ambition of all racing greyhounds ultimately being able to be adopted. There has been a real decline in the number of dogs being bred and a real increase in the number that are being adopted. Euthanasia rates of course were a matter of significant concern when these reports were tabled in the Parliament and made public. There was a significant decrease in the euthanasia rates to around 3000 in 2015–16. GRV are confident it will be less than 2000 this year.

Greyhound racing found itself in a very, very precarious position as a result of the live baiting scandal. There has been some very good work done in the almost two and a half years since to improve standards. Strong animal welfare standards, I think, are absolutely essential for greyhound racing to have a strong future.

Clyde Road, Berwick, level crossing

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. Minister, a recent comprehensive development plan for

Berwick released by the Victorian Planning Authority identifies a potential sky rail measure to remove the Clyde Road level crossing. Can the Andrews government guarantee to the residents of Casey and Cardinia that no elevated rail or rail over road will be used to remove level crossings located in these municipalities?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mrs Peulich for her question.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JENNINGS — We are an inclusive government. We actually welcome the participation of our members. In fact we are a collegiate and collaborative outfit. That is not necessarily what actually happens in all political parties in this Parliament or in other parliaments around the world. In fact there are a lot of tensions in lots of coalition caucuses around the country; I have no doubt about that.

In relation to the question that Mrs Peulich has asked me, the intention of the government has been clearly articulated in relation to our level crossing removal program and has been worked through by my colleague the Minister for Public Transport and those who provide support to her through the Level Crossing Removal Authority through Public Transport Victoria. Each and every day they go out of their way to try and tease through the planning considerations of the existing program, whatever improvements to the program there may be in the future and other level crossings that actually may be considered in light of the government's clear success in rolling out this level crossing program.

There are a number of communities who are already probably champing at the bit to actually have this program extended to their municipality. I think right throughout Victoria there are many, many communities that actually want safe level crossings beyond the 50 level crossings that have been identified by the government. Indeed at the most recent count I think somewhere in the order of 28 level crossings will be completed during the course of this first term. That is quite a remarkable achievement in relation to the rollout of a major infrastructure agenda. Not only is this improving the safety and the amenity of all those communities that have received the benefit of the level crossing removal program up until now but it has also created thousands of jobs in the construction industry in addition to other economic activity that has been driven off it. When we talk about the level of economic activity in Victoria, the level crossing removal

contribution has been a pump primer to job creation in this state.

If Mrs Peulich actually wants to start speculating about the design of level crossings and level crossing programs beyond the scope of the decisions and the announcements that the government has already made, in the name of trying to generate anxiety within the community, that is not the hallmark of the way in which we want to roll out this program. We want to work with communities in the way we design and implement these into the future. We are not in the business of prematurely ruling in or ruling out matters. We do not want people to start jumping to conclusions about projects that have not even been announced yet. We actually want to work through it assiduously. If a more detailed answer is required beyond what I have described, I am happy to raise this matter with the appropriate minister, the Minister for Public Transport in the other place.

Supplementary question

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I am well aware of the government's method of working through issues assiduously, which is the reason for my supplementary question. Minister, is it not a fact that government agencies and departments have already approached local businesses and community organisations in the City of Casey to seek third-party endorsements for an elevated rail and, to avoid a public backlash against the Andrews government, are requiring confidentiality agreements to be signed prior to any discussions taking place? That is your method and that is your hallmark.

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — President, you could almost rule that question out because it is almost incomprehensible in relation to its form, its content and the multiplicity of it. In fact for half of the question I actually thought the government was being accused of getting out ahead of its current level crossing program and actually consulting with future communities about projects that have not even been announced or considered yet and being asked whether that was a good or a bad thing. I was not actually sure what the member was getting at.

Is it a good policy to get out in advance of actually talking about programs that have been announced? Is that a good idea or a bad idea? I actually thought the question was a little bit confused on that matter, but I do know that whilst I may have been confused about the member's question she certainly provided me with an opportunity to talk about the way in which consultation takes place in relation to the confidentiality

element, and I can specifically refute the sting in the tail of that supplementary question.

Department of Health and Human Services

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Families and Children. Minister, I refer to the Bendigo child protection unit manager who was convicted of child pornography offences and who, despite having more than 980 child exploitation images on his devices, is today out on the streets under a community correction order after receiving only 116 days in custody. Minister, now that the case is closed and it has been revealed that Victoria Police were unable to search a further 1.91 million images on his devices, did the Department of Health and Human Services conduct its own internal review of his devices?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question, and I do make the point that I have in fact provided the member with a written response to these — —

Ms Wooldridge — No, you said you could not say anything. You said the case was closed.

Ms MIKAKOS — At the time I did actually also provide a written response to the member around the procedures that the department follows in relation to these matters. My understanding of this matter is that the department did do its own internal investigation and that it was identified that no clients of the department were the subject of the abusive material that this individual had in his possession; rather he had in fact sourced this material through external sources.

It is a terrible thing when you have individuals who are in such positions of trust in the community engaging in such criminal behaviour. I am appalled by it. My department takes these matters very seriously. I recall that I did advise the member at the time in my written response that in fact this individual was stood down immediately upon the matters coming to light. My department has acted appropriately in relation to this matter. Obviously I cannot provide a commentary about the sentences imposed by any court, but my department has acted appropriately in looking into this matter and taking the necessary action.

Supplementary question

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for the response. Minister, in 2015–16 there were 38 543 reports made to child protection services about the wellbeing and safety of children in the Department of Health and Human Services northern

region in Victoria, some of which involved some of the most serious cases of child exploitation, so I ask: what audits of devices are conducted proactively to ensure that this is not happening elsewhere?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her further question. Again I refer her to the written response that I did provide to her previously on this matter, because she had asked me a very similar question about whether other individuals had been found to be privy to similar offences or behaviour. At that time I did give her the advice that I had received from the department — that is, that we had a particular matter that had come to light and that there were no further child protection staff who had been identified as having committed similar criminal behaviour. I did also provide to her in that written response the processes that the department does routinely undertake. There is a process by which departmental IT staff go through and seek to identify inappropriate material on staff members' devices, so there is a process by which the department does seek to ensure that staff are not engaging in inappropriate or illegal activity.

Kindergarten funding

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is again to the Minister for Families and Children. Minister, last December a parent from a kindergarten's committee of management had to pay one of the kindergarten's early childhood educators from his own pocket across two pay periods because of a payment shortfall from the Andrews government. Many more kindergartens are having to fundraise to cover significant shortfalls in operating costs, including early childhood educator salaries. Earlier this year the Andrews government banned parents from holding fundraising activities in government schools, so I ask: will you ensure that parents groups in kindergartens across Victoria will not also be banned by the Andrews Labor government from conducting their desperately needed fundraising activities?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question — a rather odd question, I have to say. It just shows that Ms Crozier is really struggling to come up with any early childhood questions. I am very proud of the fact that we have delivered a record early childhood budget this year. We have put out an early childhood reform plan that has more than \$100 million in new funding for our kindergartens in Victoria. We are the first state to be introducing needs-based funding into our kindergartens; we are the first state to do this. We have put in place more funding for children from

disadvantaged backgrounds — Aboriginal children, children known to child protection, children with disabilities — to participate in kindergarten. We have put in place funding for the new ratios that commenced last year — something that the previous government did nothing on despite the fact that it signed up to a national partnership many years ago. I could go on about the reforms that we have put in place to provide more funding to the kindergarten sector, so I find it quite bizarre to have the member come in here with a claimed example that she has provided no detail on whatsoever.

Of course parents are fundraising for kindergartens. I make the point to Ms Crozier that the vast majority of kindergartens in our state either are operated by community-based not-for-profit organisations or are for-profit long day care centres running kindergarten programs. The state itself runs a tiny number of kindergarten services based in our schools, so of course parents fundraise and will continue to fundraise. They are providing support to their community and to the children who derive the educational benefits of participating in a quality kindergarten program.

I am not quite sure what Ms Crozier is getting at here, but there is absolutely no intention to prevent parents from fundraising for kindergarten activities. In fact one of the initiatives that we put in place last year was funding for our small rural kinders. It enabled our small rural kinders in some locations to reopen, because they had massive funding shortfalls under the previous government's model and we fixed that. Our new school readiness funding that will be going out to our kindergartens will mean that some kindergartens will get about \$100 000 additional funding each. That is a massive gain for our kindergartens. It will pay for speech therapists; it will pay for child psychologists, social workers and additional early childhood professionals to come in and work with some of the most vulnerable children in our kindergartens. This is a government that is delivering in every budget to our kindergartens, and the children of our state are deriving the benefits.

Supplementary question

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister. Minister, in your answer to my substantive question you talked about funding to rural kindergartens. Recently you received a report from Deloitte highlighting the shortfalls in state government funding for the kindergarten sector. My question is: Minister, how many millions of dollars did the report identify that the Andrews government was underfunding the kindergarten sector by across

Victoria — a sector now actively fundraising in order to keep operating?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — Thank you for that question. Clearly the member was not listening. I talked about how in last year's budget we delivered \$4.4 million to our small rural kindergartens that has meant that where we had a situation previously where parents were fundraising to pay for their early childhood teacher we are now making up a massive gain because our kindergartens, even if they have one or two children enrolled, are being paid as if they have at least 18 children enrolled, so this is a significant gain for our smallest rural kindergartens. They have received a minimum base level of funding which they did not have previously. This is a significant win for rural communities, making sure that children right across Victoria can access local kindergartens in their communities. This has actually seen kindergartens reopen in some communities that had previously closed.

Greyhound racing

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Many greyhound establishments have said that your draft code of practice for the keeping of racing greyhounds will put them out of business, some saying the fencing requirements alone will cost up to \$100 000. Other measures include having to remove a puppy if it is bullying another puppy, having to disinfect every dog lead weekly and a requirement to rotate each dog's toys each week. Minister, given the Andrews government's track record of failing to listen to community members such as Country Fire Authority volunteers and even your own puppy farms legislation, how can the greyhound industry trust you will listen and take into consideration their views of this draft code?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Ms Wooldridge for her question. She must have been doing something else when I provided an answer to a very, very similar question from Mr Purcell not 20 minutes ago. What I can indicate is that the draft code — and I emphasise the word 'draft' — has been developed in close consultation with Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV). GRV are running a series of consultations with their members and will be providing feedback to the government. The racing minister has indeed had a discussion with the leadership at GRV about this. As I indicated to Mr Purcell not very many minutes ago, GRV had initially indicated that they wanted a longer period of consultation. Now they are indicating to us that they are much more likely to take a shorter period to provide feedback. Their desire now is

to provide feedback to government more quickly, so we welcome that.

Ms Wooldridge — Will you listen to it?

Ms PULFORD — Of course we will. There are a number of submissions that have already been received. Some of them think the code is too onerous and others think the code is not onerous enough, but the point of the two-month consultation period is to hear from everyone who has a view on this issue. We agree with the code that strong animal welfare standards are absolutely essential for the code's future. Unlike your friends from the Liberal Party in New South Wales, who undertook the enormous overreach exercise in banning and then unbanning greyhound racing, we have been working very, very closely with Greyhound Racing Victoria for more than two years now on the implementation of some 68 recommendations from two different reviews — the Milne and the Perna reviews — and we will continue to work closely with greyhound racing. Greyhound racing is much stronger now than it was when we came to government; it is much stronger now than it was in February 2015, when Australians were shocked and horrified by the appalling live baiting footage. At every opportunity since then we have worked with the industry to make it stronger and to ensure that it has the support from the community that it needs to be stronger.

I might recap, because I do not think you were listening to my answer to Mr Purcell's question. Breeding numbers are down dramatically, adoption numbers are up significantly and euthanasia rates have dropped a great deal and continue to drop, so we are, with Greyhound Racing Victoria, delivering much better animal welfare standards, which is absolutely essential for the strength and future of greyhound racing in Victoria.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her answer. As she well knows, the greyhound industry generates over \$400 million in economic activity and provides just on 3000 jobs in Victoria — a very significant and important industry. Minister, I ask: is it not a fact that your over-the-top draft code of practice, if implemented, will actually result in the closure of the industry by stealth through these backdoor mechanisms?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — President, thank you for the opportunity to respond to Ms Wooldridge's utterly ridiculous assertion. Our government has supported and worked with Greyhound

Racing Victoria since February 2015 to respond appropriately to these issues, and greyhound racing is much stronger in Victoria for it and has much better animal welfare standards as a result. The code is a draft. We want everybody who has got a view on it to provide that to us so that we can finalise a code that provides proper animal welfare safeguards but also the ongoing strength that underpins greyhound racing in Victoria. We will continue to work to that end.

I can only imagine that the Liberal Party at the time were probably quite supportive of Mike Baird's initiative to ban greyhound racing in Victoria. In New South Wales, by contrast, it was a kneejerk reaction. The Liberals banned greyhound racing, they had to reverse the decision and they are basically back to square one, whereas we have made all of these major, major improvements.

Questions interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take this opportunity to acknowledge Mr David O'Brien, a former member of this place, who is in the gallery today.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Questions resumed.

Greyhound racing

Mr O'SULLIVAN (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Your draft code of practice for the keeping of racing greyhounds states that for every 25 greyhounds housed in an establishment, strict staffing levels must be met. Minister, can you advise how many establishments in Victoria are affected by this staffing-level clause in your code?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I feel like everybody's ears are painted on today. Mr O'Sullivan, I refer you to the answer that I provided to Ms Wooldridge just a few moments ago and the answer that I provided to Mr Purcell earlier in question time. It is great to see that there is so much multiparty interest in the work that our government is doing with Greyhound Racing Victoria to strengthen and support greyhound racing in Victoria so that it can have a strong future underpinned by much greater animal welfare standards. The code — —

Mr O'Sullivan — On a point of order, President, in relation to relevance, the minister has just given general responses to previous questions. This question is quite

specific in relation to the staffing levels and how many affected establishments there will be as a result of those staffing levels.

Ms Shing — On the point of order, President, the minister has been on her feet for a very short period of time. Despite the fact that relevance may be a concern, which has been raised by Mr O’Sullivan, if previous members had in fact listened to the answer given to Mr Purcell we might not be in this position. The minister has 3 minutes and 18 seconds remaining on the clock, so I cannot see how in the absence of a capacity to direct the minister to answer in a certain way there would not be an opportunity for her to continue with the answer that she was in the process of giving.

The PRESIDENT — Order! In respect of the point of order, the minister has only been on her feet for a fairly short time and is able to provide context in terms of an answer. I am sure that she will take into account the specific nature of this question going forward.

Ms PULFORD — The member poses a really hypothetical question, because there is no code with that requirement. There is a draft document that is out for consultation that was developed in partnership with Greyhound Racing Victoria whereby people who are involved in the industry and other members of the community who have an interest in welfare issues in relation to greyhound racing will be providing that information to us. Mr O’Sullivan’s question is very hypothetical, but what I would say is that we have made significant advances in improving animal welfare for greyhound racing.

Greyhound racing was in real strife back in February 2015 and is much stronger now as a result of the work that our government has done and the work that the code has done in the period since then on the implementation of all the recommendations from the Milne and Perna reports. The recommendation to develop a new code was tabled in the Parliament more than two years ago, so this work has been continuing. There were a lot of recommendations, a lot of detail and a lot of room for improvement in animal welfare standards, as I think anyone who watched that *Four Corners* footage would recall. We have been working with the industry to provide the support that they need and the improvements to animal welfare that will underpin greyhound racing in Victoria and ensure that it has a very strong future — much stronger than the future that the coalition gave it in New South Wales.

Supplementary question

Mr O’SULLIVAN (Northern Victoria) — Minister, your draft code of practice for the keeping of racing greyhounds requires these establishments to rinse dog bowls daily and then at least once per week wash them in hot, soapy water or a dishwasher. Do you undertake this level of hygiene with your own pug Molly, or are you just asking the greyhound industry participants to undertake standards that you do not adhere to yourself?

Ms Shing — On a point of order, President, Mr O’Sullivan has not been in this place for as long as many others, and on that basis he may not be aware of the standing orders or the general orders as they relate to question time on government business. On that basis, perhaps he might like to rephrase his question so that it does not actually relate to a dog owned by the minister or matters which do not fall within the scope of her ministerial responsibilities.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Shing is generally right — she is batting well at the moment — in the sense that questions need to be relevant to the minister’s portfolio and government responsibilities. Whilst I indicate that Ms Shing is correct in that interpretation of the standing orders, I think I will allow the question on this occasion on the basis that the member, rather than talking specifically about the minister’s pet, is actually seeking to understand whether or not the sort of requirements placed on the industry under the draft code would be met by the general population in terms of their well looked after pet. I think there is a broader connection in this particular question than might on the surface be the case, but nonetheless I think Ms Shing’s point is one that it is worth us all bearing in mind.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — Molly’s going to be so excited to hear that she was mentioned in the Parliament, but just to even things up, I probably should give a shout-out to Fergus the dachshund and Archie the cat, because the way they fight for turf has got to be seen to be believed. What I would indicate to Mr O’Sullivan is that there is a separate code that relates to the keeping of domestic pets in a domestic setting, but Mr O’Sullivan should know that and he might be being a bit cute by pretending that he does not.

Mr O’Sullivan again, I think, makes an error in assuming that this code has any standing other than as a draft document that is out for consultation. It has been out for consultation for a handful of days, and we certainly look forward to hearing from anyone who has an interest in this matter. We welcome suggestions on the code, and perhaps I can look forward to a

submission from Mr O'Sullivan, and anyone who wants to have their say on the draft code certainly ought to do so. Any changes that need to be made will be made.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The government has furnished three written answers to questions on notice today: 10 910, 10 970 and 11 164.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — On 6 December, which is over six months ago, I asked a series of questions of the Minister for Health in the other place through the Minister for Families and Children. The questions were 9415 through 9422. About two weeks ago I alerted both the Minister for Families and Children and the Minister for Health that these questions have not been answered, and they have still not been answered. I ask that the Minister for Families and Children follow up these questions to ensure they are answered, at least now, within some close period of time, given they are well outside the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Mikakos, are you aware of those ones?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I will endeavour to follow up on any outstanding questions on notice with the relevant minister.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Perhaps I can help the minister, who was not listening. It is questions 9415 through 9422. She was emailed about these two weeks ago, as was the Minister for Health, and there is still no response.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Written responses

The PRESIDENT — Order! In respect of today's questions, I seek a written response from Minister Pulford to Mr Barber's question — both the substantive and supplementary questions. The actual question refers to a minister in another place, the Minister for Resources, and so that is two days. Mrs Peulich's question to Mr Jennings — just the supplementary question, and that is two days because it also involves a minister in another place. Ms Crozier's second question to Ms Mikakos — the supplementary question, and that is one day. Mr O'Sullivan's substantive question to Ms Pulford — that is one day.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Northern Metropolitan Region

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My constituency question today is for the Minister for Sport, John Eren. This may interest the newest member in the chamber today, because it concerns Oak Park sports and aquatic precinct. The new Oak Park sports and aquatic precinct is being supported by Moreland City Council. It will hopefully provide two large outdoor waterslides, an outdoor 50-metre pool, a children's water play area, leisure and learn-to-swim pools, a 24/7 gym and some fitness rooms, an upgraded canteen, a kiosk, some car parking and a new sports pavilion. The current aquatics centre is in a significant state of disrepair. My constituency question to the minister is: will he join with Moreland City Council to help fund this very important project for the people of Oak Park and surrounds?

Eastern Victoria Region

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — The question that I have is for Minister Foley, the Minister for Creative Industries, and it relates to the upcoming René Magritte exhibition at the Latrobe Regional Gallery in Morwell. The exhibition will be in the Latrobe Valley from 19 August to 19 November and feature never before seen photos and films by the renowned Belgian surrealist René Magritte. In this regard I would ask the minister how we can support local business to provide goods and services to patrons and visitors to the Latrobe Valley during this time to make the most of what is anticipated to be a huge influx of visitors coming to enjoy this cultural experience and what work can be done to provide further access to other artistic exhibitions and installations in and around Gippsland during this time to make the most of visitor interest throughout the period.

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. *Plan Melbourne* action 67 entitled 'Golf statewide facilities plan' says:

Work with the golf industry and local government to develop a strategic metropolitan-wide facilities plan that will meet the future needs of the sport, given the increasing pressures for some golf courses to be rezoned for residential use.

Can the state government confirm it will not be rezoning the Keysborough Golf Club site out of the green wedge?

Eastern Victoria Region

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Minister Dalidakis, and it relates to small businesses struggling to survive right across Central Gippsland and in particular throughout the Latrobe Valley and Heyfield districts. Transport operators, log truck proprietors and maintenance engineering companies and their employees are under significant pressure. Constituents are saying to me that they are and will be all competing for the scarce remaining contracts and that they are keeping their employees on at the minute but cannot sustain ongoing losses. The government should be saving and creating jobs, not paying consultants.

A number of small businesses in the Latrobe Valley are reliant on the operations of the Carter Holt Harvey and Australian Sustainable Hardwoods mills in Heyfield for their livelihoods. All these small businesses face an uncertain future due to the pending closures of those mills and the unwillingness of the Andrews Labor government to intervene. Minister, what assistance are you providing to these very important small businesses in Central Gippsland?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, the Honourable Luke Donnellan. There have been numerous inquiries to my electorate office from constituents regarding the completion of the removal of the roundabout at the intersection of Kings Road and Taylors Road in Delahey. I am aware that work is well underway to remove this roundabout, which is considered one of the worst roundabouts in Melbourne, and widen Kings Road. My question to the minister is: will the work to remove the roundabout at the Taylors Road–Kings Road intersection be completed within the expected time frame?

Northern Victoria Region

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question today is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The Queen's Birthday weekend saw the close of the Victorian duck season, which in many ways was quite successful. In the last week, however, I have had many discussions with hunters about what they will now do in the off-season, including many who will be volunteering in conservation projects such as the continued work at the Heart Morass and the

Connewarre Wetland Centre. Unfortunately a sore point raised has been the exclusion of hunters from the Winton Wetlands, and speculation has ensued as to how much visitation was missed out on throughout the hunting season. Given that the restoration project being implemented is based on driving tourism, could the minister please provide a summary of the visitation rates since the project commenced?

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is too general for a constituency question. It really is an adjournment matter.

Mr YOUNG — I have had numerous people bring this up as an issue, and they specifically want to know how many people are displacing them in an area that they are not allowed to go into. It is a contentious issue, and we have been advocating for that to be changed. These people want to know the details as to why, and it is a very local area surrounding the Winton Wetlands near Benalla.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will let it in.

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and it is in relation to the deeply controversial and unpopular sky rail proposal for the Frankston line. I understand that the minister responsible for sky rail, the Minister for Public Transport, has referred several of the stations for environmental impact statements. However, she has not done so for Seaford and Carrum despite a motion being passed by this chamber in October 2016. I ask the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, who has responsibility for the management of our environment, including meeting our international obligations to protect Ramsar-listed wetlands, what actions she is taking or will take in order to make sure that our international obligations in relation to the protection of Ramsar wetlands, such as those in Seaford, will be fulfilled, and I call on her to refer the matter immediately to the federal department for consideration.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — On many occasions over the last eight years I have raised the issue of a lack of modern and appropriate governance structures at the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve. Last year on 15 September I raised the issue again with the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. I received a response on 27 October

last year that the government would be introducing new governance structures at Caulfield Racecourse, that there would be a body established to implement the outstanding recommendations from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report into the management and oversight of Caulfield Racecourse and that the time line for the introduction of these new governance structures would be mid-2017. It is now mid-2017, and I see no sign of those new governance structures at Caulfield Racecourse. So my question is: when will the new governance structures for Caulfield Racecourse Reserve be introduced?

Northern Victoria Region

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. The Cobram State Emergency Service (SES) unit do not have any official premises. They are currently providing emergency response solely due to the generosity of the public, with their rescue truck garaged at a private residence and other assets — boats, four-wheel drives, trailers et cetera — inconveniently garaged 25 kilometres away at the Tocumwal SES headquarters in Tocumwal, New South Wales. They advise that a longstanding agreement between the Municipal Association of Victoria and Victoria SES whereby shires across Victoria provide SES units with shire-owned facilities and/or land from which units can base their operations and training was never fulfilled in Cobram.

As the minister will know, from the end of June 2017 SES units will transition to a model where funding is entirely under the state government. Therefore Cobram SES is seeking \$1.6 million from the Victorian government to establish a Victoria SES facility in Cobram to ensure they can respond directly from Cobram to improve emergency response times and outcomes. Will the minister provide Cobram SES with a grant of \$1.6 million to establish a Victoria SES facility in Cobram?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I am hearing from constituents in Williamstown who are increasingly concerned about the removal of two level crossings in Kororoit Creek Road, Williamstown — both of which, I might add, are on two of the least serviced train lines in all of Melbourne. Their concerns are that the removal of these level crossings will simply draw more traffic through Williamstown and make it a more attractive route, especially given the increasing truck traffic predicted

for nearby roads as a result of the West Gate tunnel project. I ask the minister: will the government publish all data on the effects on traffic volumes of the grade separations, particularly in light of traffic projections for the West Gate tunnel project?

Sitting suspended 1.01 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

FIRE SERVICES

Debate resumed.

Mr O'SULLIVAN (Northern Victoria) — I wish to continue speaking to the select committee motion that is before the house and some of the things that need to be looked at right across this particular subject matter in relation to the impacts on fire service delivery across the whole of Victoria. In terms of what the changes are and the bill that has been brought to the house, I do not think we have a clear understanding of exactly what the bill encompasses at this point. There is no doubt that we have had some information come out in relation to what this bill is, but I think it would be fair to say that that information does not cover the whole gamut of what is in front of us in terms of what this bill is and particularly in terms of what this bill could be or might be.

We heard Ms Shing in her contribution talk about this issue being politicised. It is interesting that Ms Shing, who is from the government, said this issue has been politicised. I think there is no doubt that it has been politicised, but it is the government that has been the instigator in terms of politicising this issue. The most obvious example of that is the fact that the government brought in the presumptive rights aspect of this bill and not just the restructure of the fire services, which they talk about so often. If the government were not politicising this issue, they would have introduced separate bills — one that just dealt with the restructure of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and another in relation to presumptive rights, which I think is generally agreed upon across both sides of the chamber.

In terms of presumptive rights legislation we have seen that CFA volunteers have had significant concerns in relation to that as well. It is clear that the presumptive rights legislation would have an impact on career firefighters, but I think that some of the aspects of the legislation that provide for presumptive rights for career firefighters do not carry across to volunteers — they do not provide the same rights or have the same impacts — so there are issues in terms of equality. There is no doubt that this issue has been politicised and should have been dealt with in separate bills, but that is another matter.

This motion will also look at the effect on volunteers' engagement and participation in fire service delivery, and there is no doubt that CFA volunteers are uncertain as to what this bill will mean for them. That is why this inquiry will be very effective. It will allow those people to come forward and put their point of view in terms of what those impacts will be. As we have seen very clearly already, there have been many people involved in the restructure of the CFA who do not agree with it. We have seen it on so many occasions that it is actually frightening; I cannot ever remember it happening before.

People who are involved in the CFA have certainly had that view. Right from the word go the former CFA minister — the then Minister for Emergency Services, Jane Garrett — felt that she could not continue in her role because she did not agree with what the legislation was going to do. She was concerned about the impact it was going to have on Victoria's fire services and emergency services. The whole membership of the CFA board have not continued in their positions. There has been a bit of conjecture about the exact circumstances of them leaving their positions en masse, but they certainly ended up leaving. In fact I think it was the new Minister for Emergency Services who asked them not to continue in their roles because of their serious concerns about the impact of this bill on fire services.

The CFA chief officer, Joe Buffone, also left his position because he obviously had some concerns, as did the new CFA CEO, Lucinda Nolan; she could not continue in her role either. That flowed on to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) chief officer, Peter Rau, and to the deputy chief officer, David Youssef. The list goes on and on; it is almost endless. MFB CEO Jim Higgins is no longer there, the MFB acting chief officer has gone, the MFB deputy chief officer has gone as has the MFB board. It is a pretty distinguished list of people who have had very senior roles in these organisations. For one reason or another they decided that they could not continue in those positions as a result of what was presented to them with the restructure of the fire service.

This inquiry will certainly create the opportunity for some of those people to come forward and give some information to the committee that would benefit us all in terms of understanding some of the impacts behind the scenes. These are the people who have been involved in this from day one. Obviously they did not like what they saw, so they decided that they needed to step aside because they would not be a part of undertaking those changes.

One thing that also convinced me about the need for an inquiry was the number of significant bushfires that we have had in Victoria, and Black Saturday is the one that probably springs to mind more than others. Obviously there was a lot of work done on what happened during that fire. There was a royal commission into the fire itself, and that was headed up by Jack Rush, QC. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission did a lot of work in terms of understanding what was going on. It went on for months and months and looked at all aspects of fire preparedness and fire responses in this state and the regulatory framework behind all of that.

I think everyone would agree that Jack Rush is an absolute expert in this area. He was quoted in the *Herald Sun* of 13 June as saying:

The ability of the CFA to mobilise the tens of thousands of volunteers to meet the threat of catastrophic bushfire as was done on Black Saturday is severely threatened by this legislation.

They are not words that we should ignore or take lightly. That quote is from the pre-eminent bushfire expert in this state, Jack Rush, QC, who conducted the royal commission into the Black Saturday bushfires. Jack Rush has certainly got his doubts as to whether this legislation will bring about the best outcome in terms of fire readiness and fire preparedness and the emergency services role that our current fire services play in this state. We should not ignore people like Jack Rush. He knows what he is talking about. He might wish to have an input into the inquiry, and he could certainly pass on some of his expert knowledge to help us all understand the broader ramifications of the legislation. I think there is a whole range of people, from all sides of this debate, who could no doubt give us information that will help us draw up a report so that we can better understand this piece of legislation.

The government has proposed some amendments to this motion. They have four things they want to change. I can say that amendment 1, which proposes changing the composition of the select committee from eight members to nine members, is something that those on this side of the house will not be supporting. With amendment 2 they wish to change the reporting date for the committee from 31 August to 8 August. That is something that we do not support on this side of the house. This matter needs to be dealt with quickly, there is no doubt about that. We do not want this to drag on for too long. But at the same time we cannot rush this. We need to allow those people who wish to speak to this inquiry to have every opportunity to do so. There are also a few administrative aspects that need to be attended to before we even get to who will be on the actual inquiry: when it will start, where the hearings

will be held and extending invitations to people who may wish to make a submission or appear before the inquiry. There is quite an administrative role that needs to be undertaken there, so we think the end of August is probably a reasonable time to aim for at this point. That is still probably not going to leave us much time because I am sure there will be people who wish to but who will not get an opportunity to front the committee.

With amendment 3 the government is wishing to have two crossbench members instead of the one referred to in paragraph 2 of the motion. That is something the opposition is not in a position to support. In relation to amendment 4, where the quorum for the committee would go from being one half of the members to five, that is something that the opposition will not oppose.

I have spoken to members of the Country Fire Authority from right across the northern part of Victoria, and they are pretty disillusioned in terms of the way these changes that would impact them have been brought forward. They think it has been rushed. They think they have not had an opportunity to be consulted. They do not think they have had the opportunity for their concerns to be heard, so they are very much wishing to have an opportunity where they can have their say before a parliamentary inquiry — this select committee — in terms of how this might work.

I very much look forward to the inquiry and the deliberations that it will undertake. Hopefully we will get some much better information in terms of the impact of this bill so this chamber and this Parliament can make a proper decision in relation to this matter on behalf of the Victorian community.

**Debate adjourned on motion of
Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan).**

Debate adjourned until later this day.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — I move:

That —

- (1) in accordance with standing order 11.01, this house requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council by 12 noon on Wednesday, 9 August 2017, a copy of all documents including advice and/or information from Victoria Police to the Minister for Police in relation to firearms in the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 to date; and
- (2) any response should conform with standing orders 11.02(3) and 11.03(1)(a).

I gladly move this motion to provide the house with somewhat of a break in the middle of a long and arduous week where we have a couple of items that have had some very lengthy debate on them. The break in that debate might be a good opportunity for people to recover and refocus.

The motion that I have moved today is a very simple motion in relation to the production of documents. It relates to the production of all documents, including advice and/or information, from Victoria Police to the Minister for Police in relation to firearms in the past two years and this year to date. My interest in moving this motion is to provide the community which is most affected by changes in firearms laws with a bit more information on the process we go through, and it is a very convoluted process that flows down from many different levels to our firearms laws in this state.

I will begin by saying that the process does not start here in this state even though these are pieces of legislation that are state legislation. The process can start in a number of places by virtue of the fact that we have a national firearms agreement (NFA) that looms over the state legislation we have, and it can be affected well in advance of any changes being made in this state and by outside influences in many ways.

Lately we have had examples of this happening where very slick media campaigns and a lack of information from various sources have influenced a procedure that started at a federal level. It started with the importation of certain firearms. A kneejerk reaction to a bit of scaremongering and a fear campaign run in the media resulted in particular firearms which had been allowed to be imported into this country for as long as we have had the firearms laws that we have now not being allowed to be imported. That has sparked a backlash from a lot of people who are being affected by this. We have not seen the changes yet, but they are going to flow down to us. This just again goes to prove how convoluted this process is.

We have a collection of states who get together and make decisions based on the national firearms agreement and make decisions to change that, all directed by the federal government, and they are to flow down and then change laws in their respective states to reflect that national firearms agreement. Unfortunately that is not always the case. It is not always done properly. There is not always synergy between states, and in many ways it is ineffective. I do have to say that, as we have said before, Victoria has probably one of the best implementations of those laws, which is probably a sad indictment of other states.

Decisions that have been made recently through the NFA process have come from state ministers who have been provided with advice on these issues, and that advice has determined their decision-making process before the issues have got to this Parliament. This has not allowed for proper consultation to take place; there is a preordained decision to bring legislation in here to come into line with the NFA. That consultation process is very important. As we talk about with many other pieces of legislation and in many other areas, that consultation needs to happen, but when we are talking about firearms laws there is no place for that to actually happen in the state before the state minister comes to the Parliament with changes.

We would like to see more transparency in the way the minister takes advice on these issues and the way the minister uses that advice in making decisions at a federal level through the NFA discussions and through those processes so that when those decisions do flow down to the state level we are not playing catch-up with why we got to that point and we are not playing guessing games as to who provided that advice. Much of that advice comes from Victoria Police, and it is a longstanding issue that sometimes there are not the right people with expertise in these areas to provide that advice. We are talking about technical aspects of firearms, the way in which they are manufactured and their functions, and we have raised issues before about people who are involved in committees, advisory panels and boards providing that advice. It is questionable as to whether they are the right people.

We just want to have a closer look at what advice is being provided to the minister by Victoria Police, and that relates to any advice that has been given in relation to changes to legislation and about which firearms can and cannot be owned. It even goes to advice that has been given to the minister by the police about aspects of illegal firearms, such as numbers of firearms that have been stolen, numbers of illegal firearms in circulation, and advice about what action the minister should be taking on those things.

It is a very simple motion. It is simply to garner documents that have been provided to the minister to advise on decisions the government has been making. We would very much like to see this motion proceed and for the government to produce those documents in good faith. They are very important to particular sectors of our community who want to know that the minister is making decisions and members of Parliament and the government are making decisions based on real advice that is actually correct. It is very important that we get that message out, and I hope that every member in this house would agree.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Time flies. Mr Young is probably an old-timer in this chamber now, but I am going to give the response that the government always does around paperwork, and I will extend it to his particular issue at the end of that. When it comes to calls for documents in this chamber, the government, as we did in opposition, will support this type of motion. We do have issues around some cabinet-in-confidence documents and commercial-in-confidence documents. I respect that in the motion Mr Young has moved there would not be any commercial-in-confidence documents because of the nature of what he is asking for.

This is where I will change the spiel that I usually give on production of documents motions. I think there may be some operational documents that might be a problem, but I appreciate that when moving this motion Mr Young put in context what he is really looking for, so that may not be an issue. I just want to flag that that could be an extra rider to what can usually be discussed. In saying that, the government have no problem in any member calling for documents. We always go through the same process. So the government will support Mr Young's call for these documents.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — In relation to Mr Young's motion seeking the production of certain documents, consistent with the position the opposition has taken in this Parliament and in the previous Parliament, we will not be opposing this motion.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I can say on behalf of the Greens, as is the case with all other parties, we will not be opposing the motion that is calling for documents. I listened to Mr Young's explanation as to why he has brought forward the motion. If I got the gist of it, it was that perhaps the advice that is going from the police to police ministers in the context of the Council of Australian Governments discussions on firearms across Australia may be incorrect or not kosher. Mr Young may wish to clarify as to what point he is actually making there in his reply.

My response to that would be it is the police who are in contact on a daily basis with the guns that are in circulation in the community. We had reports last year in the Geelong area of some 40 or so firearms being stolen. The police said again that that was due to inadequate storage by licensed firearms holders. Also, there were some cases where up to 13 firearms were stolen from properties that large numbers of firearms were stored at some properties. I think it is of concern

to everyone in the community that people hold so many firearms without any apparent reason.

I think it is worth going to where you can get a lot of information about the number of firearms that are in circulation in Victoria — for example, in the last Victoria Police annual report. You can see that as of 30 June 2016 there were 219 000 current Victorian firearm licences and 792 845 registered firearms were attached to those licences, so there were nearly 800 000 registered firearms in Victoria. There were nearly 35 000 private security licences and registrations. In that same year, when Victoria Police approved new or renewed firearm licence applications, some 957 of them were refused, some 1300 firearm licences and 179 private security licences and registrations were suspended, and 1600 firearm licences and 256 private security licences were cancelled. The police are obviously looking at the fit and proper person test for approving firearm licences, but still in any assessment of these numbers there are a lot of people with firearms licences and there are a lot of firearms in circulation.

On announcing a new national gun amnesty recently, the federal Minister for Justice said that it is estimated there are 260 000 illegal guns in circulation in Australia. Mr Young said scare campaigns are being run about the number of guns in the community. The number the justice minister mentioned is the estimated number of illegal firearms in the community. Of the 40 that were stolen in Geelong and recovered by police, several of those were automatic assault weapons and military-style weapons, which are more and more becoming the type of weapons in circulation in the community. In the hands of the wrong people these weapons are definitely a concern not only to the community but also to the police, particularly if they are stolen or imported illegally. The police are concerned because they are the people who have to be called to incidents that involve these types of firearms.

Just recently there was a report — I think it was on *Four Corners* — with regard to the importation of illegal firearms, which Mr Young dismissed pre-emptively in his introduction. I was quite astonished that illegal firearms are coming into the country and being missed by customs because they are dismantled and imported in parts, so magazines in one lot of boxes — I am not familiar with all the gun parts — and different parts of guns coming in different boxes. It was only discovered because one particular shipment contained some hundreds of magazines for semiautomatic pistols — —

Mr Young — Glock.

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes — which should be banned and not allowed into the country. These were discovered by one customs officer who was then appalled to think, ‘Well, where are the rest of the gun parts that have already come into the country?’. That spurred on some activity. They were able to recover some of those firearms, but we still have some 200 000 of these illegal firearms in circulation. I do not call that a scare campaign. I call that a very large concern for the community. I also have a question on notice that is still with the minister with regard to 3D printing and the manufacture of illegal firearms in Victoria.

While I am not opposing the motion, I do say that the community is concerned about the number of firearms that are in circulation and the number of firearms that are held under firearm licences that are not stored properly and that are being stolen, ending up in the hands of the wrong people. Also, just having firearms in circulation and accessible to people means the probability that they will be used in a crime, including in domestic violence situations, is increased. The less guns we have in circulation, the better.

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — I thank the other members of the chamber for their brief contributions on what is a very simple motion, and I even thank the Greens for their contribution. We are not without our very own dose this week of sanctimonious and self-indulgent rhetoric, which has again proven the very point of this motion. I think every buzzword that you could imagine has been used throughout the scare campaign, as an example, to stop at customs the importation of a particular firearm which has not been a problem and has not had an incident that has sparked a problem. A scare campaign has been run about this firearm without the people involved knowing the technical aspects of how the firearm works.

The Greens have just proven that they can throw all of those words out but they mean nothing when you actually look at the technical ways in which these firearms work. This is exactly the problem with people who think they can speak to the technical aspects of firearms: they just do not know. That is why we have got this production of documents motion, so we can find out what has been said by people who are giving advice on the technical aspects of firearms and whether they are qualified to do so. I thank all parties in the chamber for their support of this motion, and I commend it to the house.

Motion agreed to.

FIRE SERVICES

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan):

That —

- (1) a select committee of eight members be appointed to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 31 August 2017, on the restructuring of Victoria's fire services as contemplated by the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 and, in particular, the —
 - (a) impact on fire service delivery across Victoria;
 - (b) effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery;
 - (c) short-term and long-term cost impact on fire service provision;
 - (d) underlying policy rationale;
- (2) the committee will consist of three members from the government party nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Council, three members from the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Council, one member from the Greens nominated by the Leader of the Greens in the Council, and one member from among the remaining members in the Council nominated jointly by minority groups and Independent members;
- (3) the members will be appointed by lodgement of the names with the President no later than 12.00 p.m. on the day following the day on which this resolution is agreed to by the Council;
- (4) the first meeting of the committee must be held no later than 14 days after the day on which this resolution is agreed to by the Council;
- (5) the committee may proceed to the despatch of business notwithstanding that all members have not been appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy;
- (6) one half of the members appointed pursuant to paragraph (3) will constitute a quorum of the committee;
- (7) the chair of the committee will be a non-government member and the deputy chair will be a government member;
- (8) in addition to exercising a deliberative vote, when votes on a question are equally divided, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, shall have a casting vote;
- (9) the committee may commission persons to investigate and report to the committee on any aspects of its inquiry;

- (10) the presentation of a report or interim report of the committee will not be deemed to terminate the committee's appointment, powers or functions; and
- (11) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders and sessional orders or practices of the Council will have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing or sessional orders or practices of the Council.

And Ms SHING's amendments:

1. In paragraph (1) omit 'eight' and insert 'nine'.
2. In paragraph (1) omit '31 August 2017' and insert '8 August 2017'.
3. In paragraph (2) omit 'one member' (where secondly occurring) and insert 'two members'.
4. In paragraph (6) omit 'one half' and insert 'five'.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I rise this afternoon to speak on the motion moved earlier today by Mr Rich-Phillips to establish a select committee to scrutinise the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. This bill proposes a significant reform to our state's fire services, and there is no denying that significant reform is needed.

I just want to say up-front, as I said on ABC radio yesterday, that the impact of fire is close to my heart. My parents were amongst the last people to escape the Marysville fires on Black Saturday alive. I even spoke to my mother about this last night, and she can still vividly remember the flames behind them as they drove away. I am eternally grateful for the work of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) which saved the lives of so many on that dark day. I think that is at the heart of why we are discussing this and taking it very seriously today. The community relies on the CFA and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) — all of our fireys — to defend our homes and to save our lives. We should never lose sight of this. Ms Shing, in her contribution, said something around the lines of it being inherently important and dignified work. I would agree with that.

Now we turn to the underlying issue around this bill and its scrutiny by a select committee. There is conflict which needs an answer. Perpetual conflict has damaged workplace relationships amongst our fireys and has ultimately damaged Victoria's emergency response. This is a frustrating but accurate picture. Cultural change in our fire services cannot be addressed by indulging and collaborating with one party ahead of

another. My desire and priority is for respect to be restored and for trust to be rebuilt.

I have taken very seriously the weight of my responsibility in this debate over the past few weeks. I have deliberately sought to speak to a range of stakeholders, particularly those in my area of Western Metropolitan Region, from the CFA-only stations to integrated stations and to the MFB. All of our firefighters, career and volunteer, do an exceptional job and have my utmost respect and admiration. Not for a moment have I become complacent about the importance of the question that has been put before me as a legislator. In meeting with many groups and over the many discussions that I have had, as I said, with both career and volunteer firefighters, I have also met with lobby groups such as Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria and the Victorian Volunteer Firefighters Association Inc. I would also like to acknowledge the many emails and phone calls I have received from firefighters across Victoria on this issue; I will just ignore the abuse that I have copped on the issue.

The arguments presented by both sides of this debate have been reasonable, they have been emotive and they have been convincing. Across the board frustration levels are high and morale is low. There is a general sense that the system is broken and a fix is needed. The case for change is a convincing one. The concept of Fire Rescue Victoria makes sense in many ways. I understand the arguments around urbanisation. I understand the difficulty of areas that were once city outskirts now being different environments with new needs and new requirements. However, there is a lack of detail and technical elements of the bill are unclear. By the end of the consultation process that will be undertaken by the select committee I hope that this will become much more clear to all parties involved.

Concerns have been put to me from the government and from the United Firefighters Union in particular that short delays caused by this committee inquiry will have a devastating impact on the emergency services in the upcoming fire season. However, based on my conversations and what I have learned and observed, the consequences of passing this bill in its current form could be much, much worse. Sending this bill to a select committee should not be about stymying important reforms but ensuring we get those reforms right, respecting all parties involved and giving the reforms the best possible chance of success — success in terms of community safety, service delivery, mutual trust and respect.

I will be supporting the amendment proposed by Ms Shing earlier this afternoon to move the reporting

date to 8 August. I think that is a reasonable time frame to get this work accomplished in, and I think it is important not to delay this bill any further, if that is what the select committee decides should go ahead. I will note that I am deeply concerned about the manner in which the bill was drafted and the implications that it has for Victorian fire services. This was a common theme of concern in my many conversations. Such a proposal is deserving of due process, fair and transparent consultation and genuine stakeholder participation. Speculation has been rife in how the bill was drafted and which parties were included and excluded from the drafting process. I think that can be distracting, and I think that that is something the select committee can seek to address.

As I said, there is a lack of detail around some of the technical aspects resulting in unclear implications, and again this is why I have sought a select committee on this. I think they are best placed to investigate these concerns and to consult stakeholders in a manner which is transparent and fair. The culture I observed within our fire services is at breaking point, and I fear that the introduction of this bill in its current form cannot solve those problems yet and it cannot clarify the issues that people have outlined to me. I will note that there is a lack of respect between some volunteers and some paid staff, including abuse and attacks on social media. There have been turf wars and there has been a level of distrust. There are definitely two sides to every story, and in some incidents that were described to me differently by career and volunteer firefighters it was very difficult to ascertain what was a truth, what was a perception and who to trust. I believe that the committee process will get to the bottom of this.

I do want to note that the most disturbing thing I came across as I spoke to a number of people were the stories that I heard from both CFA members and from MFB members of the abuse that they and their families have endured simply for doing their job or for wearing the uniform. That is not good enough, and that is something we need to solve. In fact I would describe it as being a fiasco which has been incredibly damaging, and those responsible for using our dedicated firefighters as a political football should be utterly ashamed. So rather than being a tool to politicise this issue further I would hope that this select committee will take its job of scrutinising the bill seriously, deliberately and with an open mind. Change is needed. Will the restructure contained in this bill deliver this change or will it further exacerbate tensions? This is the task set before the committee, and I commend this motion to the house.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — Clearly this bill is a major reform. It is a bill that has been long overdue, but I have to acknowledge right at the start that I think one of the problems with it is the lack of consultation and engagement with both career and volunteer firefighters. I find that quite distressing because this is such important legislation, especially the legislation around presumptive rights for firefighters.

As people would know in this house, I brought a private members bill in in 2013 which was rejected on constitutional grounds. I then made a number of attempts to send a motion to a committee, which was filibustered and refused time and time again by the then Liberal-National Party government, and they refused to bring in their own bill. I find that very distressing when we look at this bill, because if that had happened the firefighters at Hazelwood would have automatically been covered. They will have to be covered by a special clause in the bill that will deal with people who have been affected at major events. The issues around compensation for firefighters who trained at Fiskville has still not been resolved. All of these things could have been resolved if the previous government had brought in their own presumptive legislation rather than then running what I consider to be quite a disingenuous pledge campaign when they were in opposition.

We support — I am not sure whether the word ‘support’ is quite right — this select committee. We accept that it is going to happen, but we think that it needs to be short, it needs to be sharp and it needs to deal with the matters that Dr Carling-Jenkins has just spoken about around the devastating effects that the issue is having on the morale of career and volunteer firefighters.

Over the last two years the way firefighters have been used as a political football has been beyond compare to anything that I have ever seen. I think you have probably heard the same stories of children in playgrounds being told that their fathers or mothers who are career firefighters are thugs and ‘I don’t want to play with you because your dad or your mum is a thug’. This is the kind of stuff that is coming back to me all the time, and yes, the social media wars have been quite ugly as well.

I think they are the things that this select committee needs to address. We will meet, we will do the hearings, we will do the report, we will bring it back to the house and we will resolve it. Hopefully the government will use that time for engagement. It is no longer about consultation — the bill is here; it is about engagement. It is those technical details that firefighters, especially volunteers, need to know, from

‘How does this work?’ down to the level of ‘We’ve raised \$100 000 for our pumper; is it ours or does it go into the new service?’. All of those kinds of things need to be addressed, and that needs to be addressed by very intense engagement out with all of those brigades.

I am not going to speak for much longer, but I think there is one thing that we need to remember: if we look at what happened in London in the last week with firefighters who went into that tower block, they put their lives on the line, and that happens every day in Melbourne. Firefighters, whether they be career or volunteer, put their lives on the line. They go into fire situations as we are running out of those fires. They are there to protect us; what are we doing as a Parliament to protect them both physically and emotionally?

The conflict that has gone on for the last two years has to end; we have to have reform of the fire services. We need presumptive rights legislation to be passed through this Parliament so that firefighters who get one of the 12 cancers do not have to actually worry about what is going to happen to their family because they cannot get compensation. They are the kinds of things that we need to be addressing rather than this very ugly political football that has gone on. For those reasons the Greens will support this motion and participate in the select committee.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to support Mr Rich-Phillips’s motion and to support the amendments circulated by Ms Shing. Dr Carling-Jenkins has been a bit of a referee between the warring parties on this issue, so maybe we should just get on with working together and actually try to end the conflict. If this is the vehicle that can do it, if we can investigate this bill and if the select committee can agree on changes that will make it work — that is, if people believe it does not work — then that is the attitude that everyone on the select committee should take, in good faith, into this process. There should be all eyes on the bill, and there should be constructive conversation around the bill and what the bill does. I do not think there is any evil intent in what has been discussed. I do think there might be some disagreement over how it should proceed or how it may be achieved.

Having been involved in a recent standing committee inquiry where there was a consensus report on taxis, it is not impossible. This issue might be pretty hard but it is not impossible, so I plead with everybody to take into account Dr Carling-Jenkins’s plea to all of us that we should go in with the right attitude, accept Mr Rich-Phillips’s motion and see if the conflict can be resolved so people can move on and those affected can get on with doing what they do best — whether they

get paid or they volunteer — which is keeping our community safe.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to be able to stand in this place to support Mr Rich-Phillips's motion. I do not intend to go into detail on the motion because Mr Rich-Phillips has already done that, but I would like to make some remarks around the travel that we have done to get to this point. In doing so I would like to congratulate Mr Rich-Phillips on putting this motion to the house. I heard the last bit of Ms Hartland's contribution as well as those of Mr Leane and Dr Carling-Jenkins, and I am of the same view that we need to take a bipartisan approach to this bill, which I understand we are doing — I also understand there are some amendments to the motion which I will let Mr Rich-Phillips respond to — by supporting the establishment of a select committee to look at the bill in detail going forward.

It is important, though, to acknowledge the reason we have got to a point where there is a requirement for a select inquiry. This is because we do not have bipartisan support for the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 as passed by the lower house, and there are a whole range of reasons for that.

I would do no justice to my Western Victoria Region if I did not at least acknowledge those people who have written to me via email or letter or who have rung me to talk about their concern with parts of the bill. These are distinct from the presumptive rights legislation, which I note Ms Hartland has been a strong advocate of. She has been a passionate supporter for the introduction to the Parliament of such legislation going back to the previous Parliament in fact when I sat on a committee with her regarding her own bill that had been introduced into Parliament. However, there are problems associated with the presumptive rights legislation as proposed in the current bill, and I am sure the select committee will have an opportunity to further investigate the concerns raised by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria in relation to the discrepancy between what is required for career firefighters in relation to accessing compensation and the different criteria that volunteers are required to meet. I will go into some detail on this because I believe volunteers should at least be considered for that compensation as well.

We already have a divide in relation to the presumptive rights legislation between career and volunteer firefighters as to who can access compensation and on what basis they can access it, which I do not believe is fair. This is indicative of the Firefighters' Presumptive

Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 itself and its lack of fairness towards volunteers. I am sure the concerns have been heard loud and clear by regional members of Parliament right across Victoria around how this new firefighting model would work and its impact particularly on the volunteer brigades but also on those integrated brigades about which there is talk not so much about integration — which appears to many who have contacted me to be more like segregation — but about co-location. That seems to be the emphasis of this new bill.

I might say that I speak with some authority. I am a Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteer, although I am not active now. I have fought most of the major fires that have happened in Victoria since 1982. I was heavily involved in Ash Wednesday; I used my own appliances from the farm to support our local brigades in the Otways. I have fought most of the fires that have happened in the north-east and in Gippsland, so I bring some experience to this chamber, having been both a CFA volunteer and also having fought most of the major fires in Victoria since 1982.

I have also been trained to use breathing apparatus. I trained at Fiskville. Under different circumstances I might have needed to apply for compensation — if I had developed cancer from either my work on the fireground as a registered volunteer or after having been based at Fiskville. Another bill that is to come before this house will seek to legislate compensation for those affected by chemicals at that facility. I am no stranger to the CFA. I have fought fires, and I am also a farmer who has provided a significant amount of equipment and manpower to protect the local communities in the areas where I have lived. I believe I have made a significant contribution to community safety in that respect.

I briefly want to make some further points. The opposition's main concerns are with consultation — or the lack thereof — primarily with volunteer firefighters and the need to make sure that Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria has a say in what the Andrews government is proposing. The opposition wants volunteers to have an opportunity to formally state their concerns around the structure of the CFA and the structure of local stations to the Andrews government.

Volunteers have genuine questions about how things are going to work when they go from integrated stations to co-located stations. Where will CFA volunteers who are co-located with paid personnel from Fire Rescue Victoria fit in? Will CFA volunteers have to pay a lease, and if so, will that come out of their operational

budgets? These are the sorts of questions that still need to be answered, and hopefully they will be answered through the select committee.

When volunteers in Wodonga asked CFA chief officer Steve Warrington about how co-location might work he could not provide certainty. 'We may put in a captain; we may not put in a captain', he told them. If the chief officer himself is not quite sure how it is going to work, how can anyone else be expected to understand it? That is why comprehensive consultation is desperately needed.

Departmental officers have been drafting the legislation for five months. When the opposition finally received a departmental briefing the department seemed to be guided by ministerial advisers instead of speaking to the facts on the table. Yet when the CFA board members were asked about it in recent weeks they said they knew nothing of it. Even the emergency management commissioner, Craig Lapsley, swore in February this year that he had no idea and no understanding that the state government was looking to change fire service boundaries. It therefore appears that the department is proposing changes to legislation that will affect everything that Craig Lapsley does, everything that Steve Warrington does and everything that the chief of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) does without consulting any of them.

The current board of the Country Fire Authority, a board that was installed by the Andrews government after it sacked the previous board, was installed for one purpose and one purpose only: to conclude an enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). There was no other reason. It was a political decision motivated by a political imperative: to deliver the industrial outcome that Peter Marshall demanded. This is a dreadful situation. No government should be appointing statutory boards for the sole purpose of meeting union demands. Statutory appointments and public administration have got to be based on the best outcomes for the state and the best outcomes for all Victorians.

The Andrews government would have us believe that CFA volunteers are somehow preventing the Country Fire Authority from concluding an enterprise bargaining agreement to cover the authority's paid personnel. Labor has also blamed the Turnbull government, repeatedly claiming that federal legislation is stopping this going through. That just cannot be right. The State Emergency Service (SES) recently managed to conclude its latest enterprise bargaining agreement with 140 operational staff. The SES still protects and respects the volunteers in that service, while the

proposed CFA EBA does not. Like the CFA, the MFB at the same time has also been bogged down in enterprise bargaining with the United Firefighters Union, and those negotiations have still not been concluded.

The problem Mr Marshall faces with the MFB is the board itself. It is bravely staring him down and resisting union demands, and for this reason the proposed Fire Rescue Victoria legislation will also eliminate the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board. The state will then have lost two fire services boards, at least one chief officer and perhaps both a CEO and a minister. The list goes on and on of those people who have stood up for volunteers and stood up for the public interest and are no longer there. This is just one of the major issues we have with the proposed firefighters bill.

The opposition also has concerns with the presumptive rights provisions in that bill.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — Mr Leane needs to listen to this. Those concerns are about the government claims that these provisions will confer the same rights to cancer compensation for both paid and unpaid firefighters, and that is just not correct. In briefing the opposition, the department claimed the proposed Victorian legislation was identical to Queensland legislation. In fact I heard that in the house this morning, and that is just not correct either. There has not been a lot in what the government has been saying about the impacts of this firefighter legislation that has been correct. But we will find the facts and we will find the truth through the select committee.

The Queensland legislation is simple. In Queensland a volunteer firefighter need only prove that he or she is a firefighter — no more questions. Under the Andrews government proposal, a volunteer firefighter would, in making a claim for cancer compensation, have to prove that he or she had performed firefighting duties.

Another concern expressed by the opposition is around the need for surge capacity, and I think this is important. Surge capacity is vital when we have major fire events. It is absolutely essential we have volunteers available on short notice to respond in mass numbers, and I understand that morale is low in these stations. I could go on, that is true, but I will not, because I think it is important that we allow other speakers to have the opportunity to talk about their own local brigades, the impact on them and the concerns that they have raised with our members in relation to this bill.

In summary, I congratulate Mr Rich-Phillips on putting this motion forward. I am pleased to see we have a bipartisan approach to it. I understand there are some amendments to be discussed, and I look forward to seeing the outcome of the select committee's work in relation to the investigation and the impacts of the proposed bill.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I am not going to rehash pretty well what everyone else has said. There are lots of valid points, but the main reason that this committee needs to be established from my point of view — so we are obviously supporting it — is that as crossbenchers we do not have a lot of resources with which to find out if a bill of this importance is good or bad. Come fire season when there are bushfires raging everywhere, we have got to make sure the new organisation is functioning, and pretty well the only way we are going to be able to do this is to chuck it through a committee and see what comes out.

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I rise today to speak on the motion standing in the name of Mr Rich-Phillips to establish a select committee to review the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. It is pertinent to raise that the bill encompasses two important sections. While it includes presumptive legislation, the purpose of the bill is really to split up the volunteers and the paid firefighters. In my opinion it is wrong to include these two together, because the presumptive legislation could be construed as an attempt to convince people that they should pass this bill on the basis that it includes what are some good points as well as what are some very contentious points. I have made an undertaking that if the bill does not go through, I will do my best to make certain that the presumptive legislation part of it goes through at a later stage. I have undertaken that on behalf of the volunteers that I have met with throughout this process.

This has been by far the most contentious issue that I have had to deal with during my short term in this house. In south-west Victoria there are many, many concerns that exist, and not just from the volunteers. The concerns of my constituency also come from the local baker, the local butcher and everyone you talk to. It is really not just the volunteers, and it is an issue that has dominated our media in this state more than the many other important issues that we have to deal with, so for that reason we do need to take it very seriously.

I understand the need for some reform in fire services. From the meetings I have had with volunteers, they certainly believe that as well. There needs to be reform

around the outer metropolitan areas that have changed over the last decades in that there is a change required in the services those areas need. As I said, that is understood and recognised by many people in the community. I understand that there has already been a great deal of consideration and work undertaken in regard to those boundaries. That will be, if this motion is agreed to, considered by the committee, and it will be able to report on that.

But to jump from this to the entire restructure of fire services is a big leap. This is not a one-size-fits-all issue. It may work in and around the metropolitan areas, but it is certainly not the best fit for some of the country areas. Those supporting the legislation say that nothing will change for the volunteers. If there really is no change, why have the volunteers not been consulted throughout the process? If there is nothing to hide, I would ask why there has not been more transparency. I have raised this time and time again over the past few months, but nothing has happened in regard to the consultation process. This is a major issue that volunteers have had with this bill — why there has been such a lack of consultation with them.

I have tried to bring myself up to date with what is happening with this legislation. I have read the bill, as I am sure all other members have. I have met with the government and been briefed on the bill, and I have met with the opposition. I have attended many workshops on it. I have met with paid firefighters at two integrated stations and have had seven evening meetings in regional areas to meet with volunteers. The volunteers do not have an issue with the change, but they are concerned about a number of aspects of it. They are concerned about whether they will become the second cousins in the firefighting process and whether they will be adequately funded, not only initially but in the longer term. They are more concerned about the way the bill has hit the table than the content of it. They do not want to see this legislation rushed through, and they want to make certain that they have an opportunity to have some input into what happens.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) is the backbone of many of our communities, and in all good conscience, without that consultation, I will not at the moment support the legislation, as I have said publicly. It is a strong volunteer organisation that has been around for over 150 years in one form or another. In the early days it was farmers with tanks on the back of their trucks.

That brings me to the select committee. I honestly was not sure whether to support this motion in the beginning. I am concerned that this committee will become a political sideshow and that it will not achieve

what it should. The committee should be solely concerned with the bill. It should not be made into a political football. It should consider the impact of fire services on Victoria, not the reasons for the development of the bill. I hope this responsibility is taken seriously and that the committee achieves these outcomes.

The CFA model is recognised throughout the world, and our volunteers selflessly give their time to fight fires locally, nationally and also throughout the world — they do travel to other parts. It is vital that we support our volunteers, and I hope that the committee allows this to happen. I will therefore be supporting this motion, and if it passes, I wish all the members of the committee all the best.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak to Mr Rich-Phillips's motion on establishing this select committee. I am not going to repeat the words that everybody else has spoken today. I will try and make my contribution fairly brief. This motion is in regard to some fundamental reforms to our fire services in Victoria. This issue has been deeply personal and deeply emotional for many people in this house and also certainly for many people in our community. Like all of you, I have received hundreds, if not thousands, of very thoughtful, very personal stories, emails and phone calls about this issue. These essential services and the work that our volunteers do and the work that our paid firefighters do is quite extraordinary.

I have visited fire stations in my region. I have met with many volunteers and I have met with many paid firefighters. There are stories they speak to me about of tragedies that they have had to witness, but they also speak of the wonderful rewarding work that they do when they do save someone's property or someone's house. I commend Mr Ramsay for the work that he has done in the past and for the fires that he has assisted with. I do not think I could do some of the work that these volunteers and career firefighters dedicate their time to, but I do believe that we have to change. For our fire services in the 21st century, what we have now will not take us into the future, and we do need to change. I have been on the public record speaking about this. I think we need extra funding for our Country Fire Authority (CFA). I heard Ms Shing speak about a \$100 million injection into the CFA in regional areas, and I will be very interested to hear more about that.

That is why I am supporting this motion. One of the comments that I have heard time and time again has been, 'If Peter Marshall likes it, we don't like it' — but no-one can really articulate what that is. What

volunteers are mainly articulating to me is this lack of consultation, particularly country volunteer firefighters, who do not feel that they have been brought along in this process. We are talking about some fundamental and significant changes to our fire services and to the future of our fire services. This motion will allow for that consultation to occur — for the voices of those volunteers to be heard. That seems to me to be what they want. But we do need these changes.

I would like to commend Ms Hartland for the work she has done over the years on presumptive rights legislation for both paid firefighters and volunteers. This is very important.

I was out at a fire station in Thomastown and speaking to those paid firefighters there. Some of them had pooled their leave to help one of their colleagues who had cancer. They worked together, and I think it is our duty to protect them and to recognise that they are in a risky business, whether they are volunteers or are paid. So it is very important that we get the presumptive rights legislation through.

A short, sharp review of this bill that would allow for volunteer consultation in particular, I think, would give us an opportunity to hear the good ideas from all of the good people on the ground who have written to me. I would just like to highlight one of those good people, Peter Buur, who wrote to me this week. He is not necessarily opposed to this change but believes that without consultation with the largest stakeholders in this — the 60 000 men and women who tirelessly volunteer to keep Victorians safe 24 hours a day, 365 days per year — this bill should not go ahead. I echo those sentiments from Mr Buur, and I support this motion.

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — I rise to support the motion moved by Mr Rich-Phillips to bring about a select committee to investigate the legislation being discussed, the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. I concur with many other members who have said that the bringing about of this legislation has been very divisive in the community. It is something that certainly many of my constituents in Western Victoria Region have made contact with me about and have raised significant concerns about.

One of the major concerns that has been raised with me, and why I believe this committee's work is going to be so incredibly important, is the wholesale lack of consultation with those who would be directly affected by this legislation. They are those 60 000 volunteers

that Ms Patten just referred to along with the impact that this legislation would have on them and their capacity to ensure that they can do their incredibly important work in keeping our community safe. This is something that is a very real prospect.

It was not long ago that in western Victoria, in Scotsburn, we had a phenomenally destructive bushfire that our Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers responded to enormously quickly. They did a remarkable job in ensuring that there were no human lives lost and that property damage was kept to a minimum, and that was a direct result of the exceptional work that our volunteers do. There are grave concerns among those volunteers and others that this legislation would severely impact and hinder their capacity to do that work. This select committee would have a very important job in examining the impact of this legislation on our CFA volunteers and on their capacity to do this work.

One of the more critical aspects of this legislation is the impact that it is going to have. We have had some very mixed messages from the government as well as others who are going to be involved in the implementation of this legislation. I note that in the *Herald Sun* of 19 June the CFA's chief officer, Steve Warrington, was quoted as having said:

For volunteers in our integrated stations, it will be absolutely different. Let's not sugar-coat that.

Yet we have heard time and time again from the Minister for Emergency Services, James Merlino, as well as the Premier that this is not going to change the work that our volunteer firefighters do. So we have the chief officer saying one thing and we have the Premier and the minister saying another. For this to be examined and for us to work out the exact impact this legislation is going to have, this select committee is going to have to find answers to that exact question.

They are very important questions because in Victoria, where we see some of the worst bushfires that the world sees, we need to make sure that we have that capacity and particularly that surge capacity to be able to fight those fires. Mr Ramsay was speaking earlier about his work in fighting fires, and those fires are not necessarily in areas where volunteers live because volunteers are willing to move across the state to go and fight these significant fires to support communities across the breadth of Victoria. It does not even have to be in Victoria — indeed they go across Australia and around the world. So for us to be able to ensure that that continues into the future this legislation needs to not have a negative impact upon our volunteers.

One must ask and wonder why it is that this government would not consult with these volunteers before this legislation was released. It is unheard of. Actually one might argue that it goes against current provisions in the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 which say that volunteers should be consulted — must be consulted — on this type of legislation.

With this select committee — I do hope it is supported by this house — I believe it is going to be incredibly important not only that volunteers are heard but that this committee goes to the volunteers and there are opportunities for regional hearings across Victoria so that committee members can hear from volunteers on their own ground about the fears they have about the impact this legislation would have on them. It is going to be important for as many brigades as possible to be able to speak and make representations to this committee and indeed for the committee to also receive submissions from these brigades to understand what concerns they have, understand the work that they do and understand the impact that this proposed legislation would have on their capacity to do this work.

This is an incredibly important reference for a select committee to consider, because without proper examination of this bill we could find ourselves exposing the safety of our community. My view is certainly that the first and most important role of any government is to ensure the safety of its citizens. If this legislation is going to have a negative impact on the safety of Victorians, that needs to be drawn out by this committee — it needs to be exposed — and the community needs to understand what needs to be done to make sure our community can be kept safe. Without our 60 000 volunteers — without our CFA volunteer firefighters — the safety of our community will certainly be compromised.

On that note I hope that this select committee is able to get underway, do some incredibly important work and report back to this house so that we are better informed about the way forward through what has been an absolute quagmire to this point.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise this afternoon to speak in favour of the motion in the name of Mr Rich-Phillips. I enjoyed listening to his contribution earlier today. I concur with my colleague Mr O'Sullivan that The Nationals will be supporting this motion to the hilt.

If there is one thing that I have heard much about over the last year and a half during the Country Fire Authority (CFA) debate and as a member of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning,

which is looking into fire season preparedness and has heard extensively from many volunteers across the state, it is the importance of the CFA, the importance of the volunteers and the need for rural and regional representation so that voices may be heard.

This motion seeks that there be a select committee made up of three Liberal-Nationals members, three government members, a Greens member and a crossbencher, and I endorse that position entirely. This select committee should not just be stationed in Melbourne for a few days. It is important that it gets out into rural and regional Victoria and hears from volunteers in their own space, otherwise all we would do is perpetuate the fact that this government is a Melbourne-centric government. We need to get out into rural and regional Victoria and listen to people in their patch rather than requiring, as always, that country people make the effort and come in. I put on the record that it is important to hear people in their own space and sometimes stretch our own boundaries and go out into rural and regional Victoria.

I have been listening to people — hearing from them over the phone, consulting with them or receiving emails from them — and it is interesting that they have said two critical things to me. One is that the CFA volunteers are not afraid of change. They will embrace change when it is a positive change and when the overall net benefits are for the CFA volunteers and for life and property in country Victoria. What I am hearing overwhelmingly from people is that this change has not been effected for their benefit — for the Victorian people's benefit — but for other agendas that the Labor government is running.

Throughout the debate about the lack of consultation, I feel like the government has often said, 'But we have consulted', but that is actually baloney. It feels to me like someone is walking out the front door, yelling over their shoulder, 'I want a divorce', shutting the front door and then going to their mates and saying, 'We've been to marriage counselling'. That is what we are being asked to believe, and I do not feel that it is right or just. There needs to be proper, thorough consultation.

I have been told that many of the volunteers feel that the CFA volunteer charter has been overlooked. I want to just read a couple of parts of that charter. It states:

This volunteer charter ...

Ensures the state of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect volunteers ...

It goes on:

Is it fair?

Is it just?

Is it reasonable?

Does it discriminate against volunteers?

Is the outcome practicable and sustainable?

Is it in the best interest of the safety of the Victorian community?

Many volunteers feel that this has not been addressed and that their concerns have not been addressed.

In Ms Shing's contribution to this debate I thought her slip of the tongue was very telling. She corrected it, but I certainly heard it, and I wonder if volunteers across Victoria heard it. In relation to the government's consultation with volunteer brigades across rural and regional Victoria she said — and I am not quoting, but it was along the lines of — more than 60 forums with volunteers and government have occurred since these reforms were introduced. She then corrected herself. She may choose to change that in *Hansard*, but she said 'since', and that is what many people are saying to me: it is an after-effect, this consultation. Yes, 60 consultation processes have occurred with volunteer fire brigades across Victoria, but they did not occur beforehand. There has not been a thorough 'What do you think?' situation. It has been, 'Here's what we are serving you, and we'll share with you why we think it's a great idea'.

Many people have contributed to this debate, and it has highlighted a broad range of community interests. In a letter to me a little while back the state president of the Country Women's Association, Lynette Harris, said:

On Saturday 27 May 2017 at the state conference of the Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc., members voted overwhelmingly to support a resolution to request that the state government put on hold the bill to split the Country Fire Authority until there has been serious and extensive consultation with the Victorian community, and those views have been taken into account.

She went on:

No evidence of data or inquiries has been made publicly available that support the claim that splitting the CFA is about public safety. We understand that there have been a number of major inquiries into the fire services following large fire events, and to our knowledge none of them has recommended the splitting of the Country Fire Authority.

I concur with Mrs Harris. There have been eight reviews in the past 10 years and not one of them came out and said it was in the best interests of rural and

regional Victoria or the people of Victoria for the CFA to be ripped apart. So it will be most interesting to hear what people have to say in consultation with the committee.

Mr Lance King, president of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) district 27 council, wrote to me just recently saying:

My biggest concern is the total lack of regard for the legislated volunteer charter.

As this is enshrined in legislation, has not the government broken the law in that this act (CFA Act 1958) that supports this charter was not complied with prior to the announcement last week?

On the phone he recently said to me — and I will have to delete some words:

The minister and the Premier said they have consulted widely with volunteers, and this is just ...

I cannot say what words he used next, but we can join the dots.

The lack of detail is highlighted by Mr Eric Collier, VFBV district 8 president. Mr Collier comes from a long line — a family dynasty — of volunteers. He has been in the CFA for 42 years. Interestingly his father was also in the CFA, but he was a member of the union when, as Mr Collier said to me, 'It was an honour to be part of that union, unlike now'.

I would like to read a couple of excerpts from a letter from Mr Collier, because it captures many of the concerns. He said:

The government has not made its case:

the government has not made a case for reform, or the need for this bill;

the bill proposes changes which will only benefit a small union and its members;

the bill will not generate cost savings for Victorians. In fact it will drive up costs;

the bill will not result in improved fire service delivery. In fact it is likely that service delivery will be reduced by loss of CFA volunteer resources.

Volunteers —

and this includes Mr Collier —

have already started to leave CFA. This trend will reduce the resources available to combat fires and incidents, including structure fires in commercial, manufacturing and domestic premises, hazardous materials, road accidents, and the myriad other incidents that CFA volunteers attend on a 24/7 basis throughout the year, at no charge for their services.

Mr Collier went on to say in his letter to me:

The bill entrenches the UFU's control of Victoria's fire services, guaranteeing future disputes but with a much stronger power base as more ... paid staff are employed.

The bill has not considered alternative and/or more cost-effective models of ... service delivery ...

And he went on to say that this is:

... not genuine 'reform'.

A couple of other points that are worth putting on the record from Mr Collier are about presumptive legislation. This is coming from a man who has worked in the industry for 42 years. He said:

Presumptive legislation:

it is disgraceful that the presumptive legislation has been 'lumped in' with the reform legislation on the basis that 'if you vote for one, you have to accept the other';

initial reviews indicate that the proposed presumptive legislation discriminates against volunteers to the point that it is no longer 'presumptive' for volunteers.

This means that CFA volunteers, who attend the same fires as their paid counterparts and are therefore exposed to the same carcinogens, are ... made to jump through hoops to prove their cancer was firefighting related. This is completely at odds with the presumptive principle.

Finally, he stated:

This bill should be rejected because:

it offers no prospect of worthwhile fire services reform, or more effective fire service delivery, or cost reductions;

it fails to capitalise on existing volunteer resources, and is likely to diminish them;

the presumptive legislation component is not 'presumptive' for CFA volunteers ...

His final point is:

There has been zero consultation with CFA volunteers during drafting of the bill.

I think that is a very important point, and one that Mr Jack Rush also highlighted in his advice to Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria in his review of the bill. I would like to quote him again, because we are often told in this place that we are playing politics, but I am reverberating what is being said out in the community in my patch and also by an eminent QC, Mr Rush. He said:

The royal commission into the Black Saturday fires of February 2009 is the most thorough and comprehensive investigation of firefighting operations in this state in the last 50 years.

The evidence and findings of the royal commission established that the CFA was the nation's pre-eminent firefighting organisation. Yet this state government, led by Premier Andrews, over its years in office continues to demonstrate a determination to undermine the CFA to the destruction of the very essence of what makes that volunteer organisation so strong — the ethos, integrity and independence of volunteer firefighters across Victoria.

...

... the bill, if passed, will serve to divide the CFA, weaken its capacity and effectiveness. To make the point crystal clear — the ability of the CFA to mobilise the tens of thousands of volunteers to meet the threat of catastrophic bushfire, as was done on Black Saturday, is severely threatened by this legislation.

In summing up, we need to give a voice to the people who have not had a voice in consultation during the drafting of this legislation. We need questions to be answered about what would happen to those 35 integrated stations if they were to be taken over by Fire Rescue Victoria. What would the co-location look like? What would be the impact on those volunteer brigades that are embedded within those 35 stations? What would happen to their equipment? Would there still be a CFA captain based there? There are multiple questions that I do not believe have been answered at these 60 hearings. I am told by volunteers that they are not satisfied with the answers that they are getting. It needs to come out, and the best way for that to happen is through a comprehensive select committee inquiry. I fully endorse Mr Rich-Phillips's motion.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Just briefly in reply I would like to firstly thank members of the chamber for their contributions on this motion. They have highlighted that there are a wide range of opinions about this legislation, but certainly there is a common view across the chamber that we need to ensure that the Parliament gets this legislation right. I am pleased that it appears to be the consensus view of the chamber that one way in which that can be advanced and we can have some confidence in the direction of this legislation is through undertaking a select committee process, which certainly on the strength of the contributions this afternoon it would appear is going to have the support of all members of the chamber.

The government has moved some amendments to the motion that is before the house this afternoon. Amendments 1 and 3 relate to changing the composition of the committee to provide for the addition of a second member from the crossbench. The coalition will not support that amendment on the basis that the composition of this committee as set down in the motion is three members from the government,

three members from the opposition, one member from the Greens and one member from the crossbench, which has been the composition used for all standing committees in the Legislative Council since the establishment of this Parliament in December 2014 and which reflects the political composition of the Council. It is an agreed formula that was put in place from the beginning and has been used consistently across the standing committees. It was also used for the Port of Melbourne Select Committee. We do not believe that a case has been made to vary that composition to add further representation from the crossbench. Obviously the five members of the crossbench have the opportunity among themselves to nominate a member to the committee, just as the other parties represented in this Parliament will nominate their representatives to the committee.

Of course I would expect that the committee will conduct most of its operations in public by way of public hearings, and the opportunity for any interested members of this chamber who are not on the committee to attend the public hearings and provide input to committee members will be there. We do not believe the case has been made to vary the standard composition of committee structures in this Parliament and therefore we will not support amendments 1 and 3 as proposed by Ms Shing.

The second substantive amendment proposed by the government is to vary the reporting date by bringing it forward from the proposed 31 August to 8 August, which is in the first sitting week of Parliament following the winter recess. Coalition members are concerned about this for two reasons. Firstly, the scope of inquiry that is required to give effect to this select committee reference, recognising that one of the big complaints made around this legislation has been the lack of third-party consultation outside government and government agencies, and even within government agencies. Therefore the need to undertake appropriate consultation through this committee process — extensive consultation, as some members have referred to — is real. That takes time, particularly with, firstly, the initial convening of the committee, which is in the hands of the Department of the Legislative Council, and then putting in place the logistics for hearings before they actually commence. That is going to take some time. We believe that a period of roughly two months, which is provided for in the motion, is appropriate and that bringing that forward to 8 August will unnecessarily compress the practical time frame available for the committee to undertake its work.

The second aspect in relation to the time frame is that at this stage we do not know who the committee is going

to be comprised of. Obviously we are approaching the winter recess and a number of members have commitments, plans to be away et cetera. We have seen some members changing their plans in respect of this sitting week and other members, no doubt, also have plans. Until the actual membership of the committee and their availability is known, the scope of bringing forward the reporting date to 8 August from the end of August we think would also be problematic, so we will not support changing the time frame or changing the composition of the committee as proposed in the government's amendments.

The final amendment proposed by the government is in relation to hardwiring the quorum for this committee. The motion as drafted provides that the quorum will be half of the members appointed. It has now become apparent through the course of this debate that all parties named in the motion intend to participate. We expect the government will be participating, Ms Hartland has indicated that the Greens will participate, the coalition obviously will participate and the crossbench will be participating. Therefore setting the quorum at a definite five, given we know that all parties will be participating in the committee, is not unreasonable, so we will not be opposing that amendment to hardwire the quorum at five.

In summary, I thank the chamber for its support of this motion. I hope that the select committee will be a satisfactory mechanism under which the concerns around this legislation can be considered and reported on and that after the report is completed the house and the Victorian community will have a better understanding of the direction this state should go in with the provision of fire services in the future.

Amendment 1 negatived.

House divided on amendment 2:

Ayes, 20

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

Noes, 16

Bath, Ms	Morris, Mr
Bourman, Mr	O'Donohue, Mr
Crozier, Ms	O'Sullivan, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Davis, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Ramsay, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)

Finn, Mr
Fitzherbert, Ms
Lovell, Ms

Rich-Phillips, Mr
Wooldridge, Ms
Young, Mr

Pairs

Elasmar, Mr
Symes, Ms

Atkinson, Mr
Ondarchie, Mr

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Shing's amendment 3 was consequential on her amendment 1 and has been tested.

Amendment 4 agreed to; amended motion agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Reference

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move —

That, pursuant to sessional order 6, this house requires the legal and social issues committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than Tuesday, 27 February 2018, on the Victorian government policies, strategy and programs regarding social cohesion, community resilience and the prevention of violent extremism, including but not limited to —

- (1) the function and operations of the Victorian multicultural affairs commission and the office of multicultural affairs and citizenship;
- (2) the operations and expenditure of the Research Institute on Social Cohesion and the community resilience unit;
- (3) outcomes from the Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce and advisory board; and
- (4) expenditure and outcomes of the social cohesion and resilience fund.

More and more often we have media reports of flashpoints, often very tragic circumstances both for those who may be caught up as offenders or perpetrators and for those who are victims sometimes of matters that are perhaps the result of some sort of inability to make a transition to a new culture or of other circumstances which have been allowed to fester and go unresolved without the necessary access to support, services and guidance. They are indeed all tragic. They are tragic for the families and the persons involved, both the offenders and those who are victims.

It is my firm belief that the functions of the office of multicultural affairs and citizenship and all those instruments that are designed to facilitate the

adjustment and address the social needs, the cultural needs and the economic needs of our multicultural communities should be directed to those areas of need. Every dollar wasted on anything that is not geared towards addressing those needs can result in those important incidents having more chance of developing into a flashpoint, into a pathway where people are caught up, and those actions will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

As a result of increased concern about terrorism and the radicalisation in particular of our young people, often online and often unbeknownst to other family members, the government recently announced a review of the state's counterterrorism measures. Most of them are in terms of legislative measures — whether in actual fact there is adequate legislation or inadequate legislation — and the review is to be headed by former police commissioner Ken Lay. It will be an expert committee. I see the referral set out in my motion as being complementary to that particular investigation because it is not just looking at one side of the ledger; it is looking at both sides of the ledger. It will hopefully provide members of Parliament, decision-makers and the public with a more comprehensive assessment of the legislative and non-legislative measures that are required to keep Victorians safe and to address areas where social cohesion is being tested.

This reference should not be deferred. Every incident that occurs could be one that we could have been instrumental in averting. This is a very important area that consumes the thinking of many families, those from multicultural backgrounds and the general public as well. This reference, which has got a longer tabling time than other references, is intended to engage members of Parliament across the political spectrum, because in the past multicultural affairs has always been something that has enjoyed support from all political parties. This referral is intended to examine the policies, the strategies and the programs that underpin social cohesion and resilience priorities as well as matters that challenge our social cohesion and stress resilience — matters that are predominantly outside the terms of reference of the inquiry to be conducted by Ken Lay. It is an important opportunity for us to review these policies, strategies and programs which underpin multicultural affairs and citizenship in Victoria.

Through the engagement that I have with multicultural communities many concerns have been expressed to me that I think give this reference some urgency. First of all, not all are convinced that the priorities are right. We saw today, for example, the government rolling out Vicky the semitrailer on the steps of Parliament House. Mind you, the Parliament's website did not have it

scheduled for a visit; it was a surprise visit by Vicky. Vicky is going to cost us about \$1 million a year. I would imagine it was intended as a consequence of this motion being moved in this chamber. I can think of many, many purposes to which that \$1 million a year could be put. I am sure that all of those members who are active in multicultural communities — whether it is Ms Hartland, Ms Springle, Mr Ondarchie or others — know so many organisations that are crying out for some additional support to address real issues which can actually facilitate the adjustment and the integration to a new life.

One that springs to mind happened some time ago. It followed the Moomba CBD riots and the media attention they got. The African communities got around together, and there is a diversity in the African communities — religious diversity, regional diversity, political diversity. I gave them the challenge of actually putting together a strategy that unpacked the challenges to identify who is best placed to assist in having those challenges met. It ranged from individuals, family members and the community as well as other levels of government, whether it be local government, state government or federal government. I gave them the challenge that once the strategy was completed — that is, once they had identified the problems and the issues and had come up with some actions — we should all be brought together again to see how we could move this forward. That happened in Kensington, and I must commend Zioni Walker, who did the presentation that night, and the African community which packed out a small hall. I was most impressed with the work that they had done, but it was only a draft strategy.

At the time they asked for funding for 12 months for one project officer to complete the strategy. Considering the importance of the issue and the amount of media attention, I thought it was a very modest request for support. I could think of no better purpose to which the social cohesion fund that had been set aside could be put than something like that. The minister's response at the time was that that initiative should be funded through their own fundraising. I must say I was gobsmacked, because this is one of those significant projects that could actually impact on a large number of people. I still regret the fact that the government did not fund that. Yes, they have taken some subsequent actions, including the establishment of an African community task force advisory committee, which has met twice. I would not have thought that was demonstrating a whole lot of momentum. There are some concerns about the composition of that task force and the lack of regional representation across all the regions of Africa. I think there was about \$70 000

allocated to the South Sudanese community for some additional work to be done.

The draft strategy was a comprehensive strategy for the entire African community that had obviously involved a lot of work and many hours of sacrifice. There are some very talented and very intelligent people and leaders in the African communities, and they were taking responsibility by actually doing that work. I would have thought that \$100 000 for a project manager would have been a very good use of that money — certainly far better than the \$1 million for the use of Vicky the semitrailer, which we saw parked on the steps of Parliament.

I call it Tricky Vicky, because the task of Vicky is obviously to go out and sell a value statement that no Victorians I have spoken to have been involved in or consulted on, except now, post the event. The faith communities were not consulted. The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria was not consulted. The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) saw an initial draft and raised their eyebrows. Ultimately they saw the final draft but did not really have a direct involvement. You would have thought that an independent statutory body that is actually tasked with the responsibility or function of consultation would have been integral in the development of such a document. But no, they were not.

From speaking to my local councils I know that virtually none of them were involved or consulted on that until now. Recently the government forwarded them a copy of the statement and asked them for feedback. Again, the hallmark and the failings of this government often emerge as a result of deeply flawed consultation. I am not sure whether they think that people are just mugs and they are just going to accept things as they are rolled out. Then they find out through a lot of heartache, a lot of agitation, that people are not mugs. They expect to be treated with respect, and especially with something so profound as a values statement — a statement that defines who we are.

We have a government failing to involve Victorians in the development of a document which should underpin some of our social cohesion aspirations. Victorians are being cheated on that process, yet we have a \$1 million truck being rolled out to promote values that people have not had a part in developing. It reminds me a little of the stunt about violence against women, or it may have been family violence, where 16 buildings around Melbourne were going to be lit up for 16 days with the colour orange. I have very little respect for those types of stunts. That to me is precious money wasted that could actually be used to help people in a real and

meaningful way. If Vicky were used to take people and resources around Victoria that could help people in those communities learn a little about where they can access a job if they are having difficulties accessing a job, or education, or referred to services that they might need — it might even be to do with family violence — or anything else, that would possibly have been a much better use of money than just simply some sort of propaganda truck to cover up for the fact that this government cut corners on involving Victorians in shaping their own destiny and their own aspirations.

There is very little that is transparent, obvious or inclusive about the way that multicultural affairs is being run at the moment. I do not know why, but I certainly feel that the wheels are rattling and falling off the truck. The Victorian Multicultural Commission is supposed to be a statutory authority. Yet at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, questions were asked about the size of the budget, the number of staff dedicated to the VMC and whether the VMC's strategic plan aligned with that of the government. Admittedly I cannot be too harsh on the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. He is having some personal issues, and his wife is expecting their first baby. I congratulate them on that. Ordinarily Minister Scott and I get on very well in the field of multicultural affairs and at the many functions we attend. We have a very good rapport; however, I will not shy away from asking the difficult questions on policy and programs. I think we need this because of the diminution in transparency, the changes which no-one understands, the increased confusion and the heightened nature of the problems that are impacting on more and more people.

The VMC has no strategic plan of its own. Although it may have an operational plan, it does not have a strategic plan. It has no dedicated staff, no budget of its own, and there is not a single mention of the Victorian Multicultural Commission in the budget — not a single mention. If you compare that with the presentation of former Premier John Brumby when he also carried the multicultural affairs portfolio, that was actually at the forefront. The VMC was the showcase, with information fully detailing its objectives and the resources that were available to it in order to achieve those objectives. Contrast one Labor government with another, and it is not a good one.

It does appear to me that the strength of the Department of Premier and Cabinet — and I cynically now call the DPC the department of political correctness — has subsumed or taken over multicultural affairs and shifted that focus to other policy priorities. I attribute that as the major reason why so many important issues that impact on our multicultural communities have been given

lesser importance and the government has been tardy in responding. We need to make sure as people who care about our socially cohesive society, people who are now in an environment that is much more marked by conflict ranging from family violence — some of which also has a cultural basis — to bullying in the workplace and right through to terrorism, that these actions are condemned. I have been on the record — and I am sure that Ms Springle and everyone in this chamber would agree — that any act of terrorism and the taking of innocent life, no matter by whom it is committed or where, must be condemned. It must be condemned every time it occurs.

The reason why we must condemn it each time it occurs is that this attitude becomes the cultural learning of what we stand for and what we do not stand for, what we tolerate and what we do not tolerate. As a democratic society we do not tolerate the taking of innocent life, even in places that are not democratic. We believe that life is precious and indeed people should not be used as instruments for evil purposes. Many parents are petrified about their children becoming seduced by evil causes. Some are concerned that their kids will be involved in crime or drugs, and some are concerned that their kids will be involved in more radical causes and be seduced online.

I want to see government policies which focus on the priorities that are going to help individuals and their families, not on stunts and not on PR. We need to understand the architecture of these policies and the architecture of these decision-making structures. Are the policies well crafted to address what should be our priorities? Are the strategies the right ones? Are the programs the ones that are needed? How are they funded, and how are they delivered? There are fewer output measures now in the budget than there were beforehand. The recommendations of the Auditor-General about the blurring of roles between the office of multicultural affairs and citizenship and the VMC not only remain unresolved but also I think they are worse now than prior to the reforms. There is not just a blurring of roles, but I think one has basically folded into the other. Centralising all of the decisions about something as important as our society's cohesion and meeting the needs of the diverse multicultural communities that Victoria is home to cannot just be left in the hands of one particular department.

This investigation is necessary for several reasons. Obviously there is a great deal of confusion about the government's policies, processes, people and structures, and the roles that they play. There are also people who feel excluded and disengaged. They do not even understand the grants process, such as when it is

advertised and when it is announced. There seems to be a lack of regularity. If we are not going to do this now, the question is when? Do we wait for another tragedy or another disaster to erupt? Every time we have a flashpoint in our community the public will ask, 'If this doesn't proceed, why has our Parliament not reviewed these matters?'. The public has a right to know what we as a Parliament are doing to help, and this review is an opportunity to hear from those key stakeholders firsthand. Given heightened concerns in this area we need to ensure that we play a role in the reviewing of policies that are relevant.

Let me also say that in our Islamic community there are significant concerns that all of them are being branded and tarnished with the same brush, and they should not be. I grew up with Muslims. I have many personal friendships with Muslims, and the ones that I have met are fine people. They are strong on family, decent people who, like my family, came to Australia in the hope of building a better life and having greater opportunities. There is nothing worse that we can do as a society than ignore legitimate problems and let the public attitude harden and become less patient in helping migrants adjust. We need to serve our Islamic communities well by making sure they receive the support that they need where they need it to make those adjustments.

The government is, as I mentioned before, less accountable than ever before in the area of multicultural affairs and citizenship, and I hope that is not the intent of the minister, because I think deep down he is sort of pretty well meaning. But because the portfolio has been merged into this larger department and the functions and roles are fairly convoluted and poorly understood, I think we need to understand how it works and how these policy priorities are established.

The multicultural community, as I said, feels far less engaged. The development of the value statement is one example. The total exclusion of faith communities when the government is considering legislation that is pertinent to them is mind-boggling. The fact that, for example, when the government was introducing the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Religious Exceptions) Bill 2016 and wanted to remove the religious exemptions — for no faith communities to actually be consulted on that I just find extraordinarily disrespectful. A person may be an atheist or believe in secularism, but I just think that the way to preserve and build a strong, cohesive and respectful society is by respecting each other's differences, whether it be on values or whether it be on matters of faith within the confines of our laws. If those laws are inadequate, they need to be changed and we as a society need to form

some sort of consensus about why change needs to occur and how it can be achieved. The low levels of engagement are particularly worrying. I think that is often the yeast that can be behind problems cropping up, and I will come to some of those problems in a moment.

The rift between the Islamic Council of Victoria and the government is also perplexing. The Islamic Council of Victoria is now headed by Mohamed Mohidine, a lecturer from Monash University. He is a fine man who has a noble vision for the Islamic community as far as I know, yet he has been slammed in the papers for a submission that was, I understand, predicated on some elements of government policy. You cannot on the one hand trot out policy and on the other hand slam organisations when they embrace it. That needs to be resolved. The last thing we need is the Islamic community to suffer from even more division.

The lack of progress on the African agenda is of concern, as I mentioned before. This needs to be advanced, and I want to know why. Why is it not being advanced? As for the diminished role of the VMC, this is an opportunity to review and revisit an important, often undebated policy, as I said before, which should be a multiparty policy. It is an opportunity to reaffirm those things that we are doing well and identify areas where we can do better and challenging areas where we may not be doing enough. To defer this motion or to defeat it would be neither sensible nor responsible.

In particular I want to look at some more dramatic examples that we have all read about extensively and just indicate the sort of focus that I think multicultural affairs needs to take on. We need to continue supporting our multicultural communities in terms of their social and their cultural needs, but we also need to do much more in helping them with the real problems that make integration and adjustment to a new life difficult. We also need to help them get jobs and get into education, because the best thing that people can do is actually be able to get a job, earn a living and look after themselves and their families. Not enough is being done in that area, so I want to see how we can actually calibrate current budgets and services to better meet those needs.

The Commonwealth Bank incident in Springvale in my electorate in November 2016 was a very dramatic event involving 21-year-old Nur Islam, who was a member of the Rohingya community from Myanmar. He had some issues and there is obviously quite a bit of evidence that he may have had some mental health issues. The *Herald Sun* reported that Mr Islam had been invited to apply for a temporary protection visa which would

grant him the right to work, access to social security payments and public housing but he was yet to do so. How is it that a person like that can actually fall through the cracks when there are so many services out there in the community? He fell through the cracks in a very, very dramatic way that resulted in him injuring not only himself but also a number of other people by carrying a container of flammable accelerant which he then lit. We have never heard the outcome of that.

There was the planned Anzac Day incident involving Sevdet Besim, 19 years of age. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment with a non-parole period of seven and a half years. At the time Justice Croucher said there was evidence that Besim wanted to pull out from his plans and that he was young and intelligent and had good prospects for rehabilitation, but he did not.

I remember also meeting with a group that wanted some additional funding for training people in how to remove online violent material — it was Dr Oboler, I think — and they were struggling for funding. This is a really good investment. If young people are being radicalised or recruited through often encrypted apps following a more casual engagement with various social platforms, then we need to up the ante. We need to educate parents, we need to educate young people and we need to educate schools in our community about how we can minimise the opportunities for young people to be radicalised.

There was the Moomba incident, which involved a group of people in the CBD. All of the African community members that I have spoken to, and for whom I have a lot of regard, say there are issues that our African communities need assistance with. Some of them are to do with the structure of families, but others are to do with parenting and also the inability to gain work. There are a lot of things that could be done in that space in order to help young people from our African communities adjust and take a path that will make them feel more engaged as well as cultivate more of a sense of belonging and inclusion than is presently the case. Much more needs to be done in that space. I just do not feel that we are doing enough.

There was the under-age marriage at the Noble Park mosque. That is in both my and Ms Springle's area. I have actually met the imam who officiated over the marriage of a minor to a 34-year-old man. Initially it was described as a forced marriage, one that involved sexual penetration of a child under 16 years of age. The girl was 14 years of age.

It was interesting that as soon as that occurred the community around the mosque took immediate action. The imam was immediately removed from his post. I commend them on taking such swift action. What that is saying is that marriage laws must be observed. The marriage of under-age girls in Australia will not be tolerated. That Islamic community showed leadership, and I commend them for that. They have got themselves another imam. I understand the old imam has been sentenced and in fact may have been suspended, so I do not wish to comment on the work of the law, but we clearly need to do a lot more about educating some families who come from cultures where early marriage is common practice and custom so that they understand that this is just not going to be tolerated and that there are penalties and consequences that follow from it. So much more needs to be done and could have been done to prevent these matters.

I will not comment on the detail of and the controversy surrounding the Preston mosque, but clearly there are some serious issues there, and I would hope that there are higher powers than those here looking into some of those fairly serious allegations.

So much more needs to be done to make the transition from one culture to another smoother and more productive. This government has focused on many of the wrong things. It has focused on the stunts and often ignored the real problems that need to be resolved and for which resources need to be marshalled. This reference is an opportunity to reassess that. It is an opportunity for everyone to play a part in it. I think it would be remiss of anyone not to support it. How can you not support a review of how we do things if it is potentially going to lead to better outcomes for those people who may find themselves victims in an area where there are not enough resources or guidance? It is about policies, it is about processes, it is about people and it is about doing work that is going to be complementary to the work that is being undertaken by Ken Lay. I do not see it as repeating it. Any of the work that has been done to review what multicultural affairs has done has been piecemeal and has really not added to our understanding as to how we can lift our game in this area, which is becoming more fraught with many more challenges.

I will not speak for too much longer. I know there are other people who wish to speak on this motion. I assure everyone, irrespective of any doubts they may have, that the work that I do and the relationships that I have enjoyed with an overwhelming number of people from multicultural communities and organisations should comfort anyone who may question my motives. This is not just about focusing on one side of the ledger; it is

about making sure that we do stuff that supports people and communities on the other side of the ledger, which is through prevention and support — not just in the traditional social and cultural areas but also in the economic area. Basically it is about hearing from those communities as to what support and assistance they need and what challenges they face and assessing how our structures, our policies and our programs are meeting them, if indeed they are. If they are, we give them two ticks. If they are not, then we make recommendations on how they can be improved. If there are gaps, it is an opportunity for this investigation to identify them and make recommendations to the government of the day.

Instead of wasting \$1 million a year on Vicky the Truck, we could identify 10 projects that could actually make a difference. I am sure Ms Springle could think of a few. The Vietnamese community would have a few ideas, especially in relation to their dual-identity leadership program. Project Voice, I believe it is called, in Shepparton have a substantial number of challenges; they could also be up for consideration. The project officer for the African community could be paid. The Islamic community could be assisted to better understand our laws and actually be provided with assistance with finding jobs, getting an education and being able to access the services they need.

Then there is the notion that somehow people are going to be completely open and up-front about family violence. When you come from multicultural communities many of these things remain under the carpet forever, but that does not mean people cannot access these services in a discreet and suitable way. We missed the opportunity with the commission of inquiry into domestic violence to look at causes; we simply looked at responses. I have said time and time again: when the complexities of multiculturalism are overlaid, many of the causes are difficult to understand to the naked eye. If you do not understand the causes, you cannot come up with effective solutions. You can spend a lot of money, but it may not make very much difference at all.

We have 100 000 newcomers to Victoria each year, which means that the problems confronted by our multicultural communities will not go away. Each wave of migration brings with it problems of its own, so we always need to be agile — to use a much-used term — review what we do and make sure we do it better. The worst thing we could do is get on with business as usual. We need to be able to change, re-evaluate, reassess and fine-tune to make sure that what we are delivering for the money that we are actually managing

on behalf of Victorians is making a difference in people's lives.

The Vietnamese community would have an idea as to how that money could be spent. The African community would have an idea of how \$100 000 could be spent. Certainly the Chinese community, which is very much focused on education and jobs, could. I was speaking with a group of Asians the other day. Many of them are working very long hours. What they really want are homework clubs for their kids so they can actually get some supervision in the local neighbourhood for their kids to do their homework after school. To me \$100 000 would actually assist with paying rent and paying for someone to provide tuition for students in those low socio-economic suburbs where we have high numbers of Asian migrants. There are many creative and necessary initiatives that we could learn about, get behind and fund rather than just focusing on spin and PR.

Some of the work that has been done by our faith communities also deserves greater support. They have been leaders. Some of the work that the interfaith communities have been involved in has been exemplary. The Islamic Council of Victoria has been collaborating with the Jewish community and also with the Christians on cultivating a dialogue and a relationship, but many of those organisations have actually suffered dramatic cuts in funding, so they have had to scale back some of those activities.

This inquiry and reference could help us to review that. It may be that that is an acceptable move, but it may be that it is not. So it is just, as I said, putting another pair of eyes on it of people from all sides of the political divide. If you set aside the political jargon and rhetoric, you will find that the motivations of most people are very similar, and that is that we want all people, no matter where they are from, what colour their skin is, what language they speak, what religion they are or what their political leaning is, to have the opportunities that most Victorians treasure, value and deserve — the opportunities to build and pursue their lives and their aspirations just like the rest of us. And some of them need a bit more help in those early days.

There are high levels of unemployment in our Afghan communities. I am not sure exactly what is being done in that space, but they certainly deserve more assistance. It is heartbreaking to hear that many Afghani immigrants have been unemployed for nearly 10 years, yet they come here with very good skills and a natural inclination towards entrepreneurship, small business and farming. It could be that we actually have some innovative programs that could help them

establish their own businesses in those areas so that they can actually get a job and be able to look after themselves and their families.

So every dollar wasted, whether it is on Vicky or whether it is on the grants that are being allocated, is a missed opportunity for those communities in particular that are facing the greatest challenges to integrate and to overcome the problems that they confront, and some of those are to do with racism. Racism does occur and it does exist. I have experienced it, and no doubt every successive generation has experienced racism. The hardest thing to do is actually hide the colour of your skin. The amount of racism that is experienced by African communities is substantial, but there is so much more that can be done to foster mentorships, internships and work experience to help them get a foot in the door and find work. Also there is a lot more that can be done in the area of education.

I want to see multicultural affairs take a real cold, hard look at itself and adopt a perspective that is designed to make a real difference to people's lives so they can achieve their potential with the support that they need, especially in those earlier years. Whether it is for new arrivals, whether it is for people who suffer from higher levels of discrimination and racism or whether it is for Islamic women who may be discriminated against on the basis of how they dress, in wearing a hijab or something like that, we need to take some action. We cannot stand by.

I have heard the government talking about acting on right-wing extremism. Well, extremism of any sort is deplorable when it seeks to deny people their rights, whether it is left-wing extremism or right-wing extremism. So I want to see a generally cohesive Victoria, and I am not confident that the policies that we are currently pursuing are going to deliver that. Every problem that we ignore or for which we delay our response allows problems to fester and allows the public to form more hardened, impatient attitudes and demand more dramatic responses. It is up to us to help lead the way on those issues, to not shy away from them.

I would certainly encourage and challenge the government to be brave and do the right thing. It is easy to use your numbers to say no, especially if you are using your influence with minor parties or crossbenchers in that you can trade off things — 'If you don't support this, we'll support you on that' — but that would be a travesty. It would be a travesty and a betrayal of our multicultural communities. So I would urge the government to actually support this. I would urge the minor parties and the Greens to support this.

We can all benefit from it, but most importantly our multicultural communities and our general community at large can be the significant beneficiaries of such a legacy. We need to be forward looking, be agile, be prepared to change and have structures and processes which can identify the changes that are needed and then put them in place much faster than has been the case. Part of that problem has been, I think, the result of the government's own structural reforms, which I have already mentioned, and some of that has not been a good thing.

In closing, could I say that this is also an opportunity to look at the relationship between the Victorian multicultural affairs commission and the office of multicultural affairs and citizenship and who does what where. No-one really understands who is responsible for which grants, what the process is or who is on the panels. There is no transparency, and it needs to be clarified. The recommendations of the Auditor-General have not been honoured; the situation has actually been made worse.

Regarding the operations and expenditure of the Research Institute on Social Cohesion and the community resilience unit, I have had a look at some of the projects that have been funded, and I must ask: are they the projects that are of the utmost urgency? I would love to have a look at what other applications were received, what should be fostered in terms of research — it is a virtual research institute — what that research should look like, what our priorities there should be and of course the outcomes of the Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce and the advisory board. I have not seen anything particularly concrete out of that except perhaps Vicky the Truck. I am not sure whether it came out of that, but I would hope that there would be more to come out of that as well as the expenditure of the social cohesion and resilience fund.

I must say that I was gobsmacked when the minister at the time said that the African community should be able to fundraise for their own African strategy — to fundraise a hundred grand — and that they needed to put a bit of skin in the game. It was a bad choice of words, and I would have thought that with the enormous amount of work and goodwill that brought together a group of very, very diverse people, that they were actually showing an enormous amount of goodwill and also putting a lot of skin into it. I would have thought that that would have been an outstanding thing to fund, especially as it encourages them to take responsibility, exercise leadership and unpack the problem so that we can all share in the solution.

The African community has other ideas. The notion of an African house is something that they are very passionate about. They believe it would resolve the problem of the African community's services and activities being fragmented. Having a single place that people can use, a one-stop shop almost, for all things African may be something that is worthy of support. I am sure that there are many, many other worthwhile examples of strategies that could assist in developing a better multicultural affairs policy and providing better support for our multicultural communities in ways that actually make a difference to them. I look forward to hearing the contributions of others on this topic. I think this is something that we could learn from, and I would encourage members to support this motion. If this motion is defeated, every time something of this tragic nature happens we could then be asking ourselves what we could have done to mitigate the risk of that occurrence.

I would urge all members of the chamber, and all political parties, to support the motion, regardless of any reticence and despite any reservations they may have. This is an opportunity to take stock and, as I said before, look at the side of the ledger that the expert panel, led by Ken Lay, will not be looking at, because they are predominately focused on the legislative responses — what is in place and what needs to be in place. We are looking at all the things on the other side of the ledger — the preventative stuff which the vast amount of multicultural affairs policy has been concerned about for a long time.

With those few words, I commend the motion to the chamber. I look to members to support and pass this motion, to set aside any reservations they may have, because the promise of delivering a better outcome in this area through government policy is so important. It is consuming so much public attention and so much media commentary, and it is causing so much anguish for individual communities who are often at the receiving end of criticism. I support the motion.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — It is a pleasure to rise and speak to Mrs Peulich's motion this afternoon. I probably should have raised a point of order during the debate. I was a little bit unclear about the terminology that Mrs Peulich used. The motion refers to the Victorian multicultural affairs commission and also to the office of multicultural affairs and citizenship. It is my understanding that they are not the correct names. They do not actually exist. I am assuming —

Mrs Peulich — Is that a point of order?

Ms SYMES — I should have raised it while Mrs Peulich was on her feet. I guess I was waiting for a house amendment, and then I got distracted by other things this afternoon. Maybe in summing up Mrs Peulich could clarify exactly what she means. I think I know what she means. I think she is referring to the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and the multicultural affairs and social cohesion division within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC). I think that is what she is referring to.

Mrs Peulich — I think you go to the nub of the problem.

Ms SYMES — We will get some clarity around the wording of the organisations and the divisions of government that the motion is seeking to examine.

The Andrews Labor government has done more to support social cohesion and prevent violent extremism than any other government before it. It is almost an unfortunate incidence that we have to invest so much into these things. We would love it to work naturally, but we are all aware of the unfortunate reality that these things do take investment and these things can take effort and time. The Victorian government has committed over \$44 million to that end since 2015. The aim of course is to strengthen Victoria's social cohesion and build community resilience to prevent violent extremism in any form, but mostly to promote harmony and acceptance in our communities.

The Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce is chaired by the Deputy Premier and was established in May 2015. The task force's important work involves a really complex set of issues, and there are no easy or clear solutions in this space. I do not think anyone is going to argue otherwise. There is no one process or pathway that leads to violent extremism. The combination of causes and drivers are unique to each individual. The government is taking an evidence-informed approach to co-design solutions with communities and other stakeholders.

The very firm advice that I have been provided with is that it would be irresponsible to release specifics of all of the initiatives, because to do so would very much undermine their effectiveness. This is indeed a responsible approach that the Victorian government adopts, and it is very similar to the federal government approach.

This motion does concern us because we would be worried that it would undermine the work of the government and of the authorities that prevent violent extremism. We are concerned that exposing the people

who are working with us, particularly community leaders who are on the front line assisting authorities to counter ISIS supporters, would put them at risk. They do a lot of great work for us, but we do not want to endanger their lives. Of course we all remember when we learned about those who were on the ISIS hit list in 2015, including a Victorian MP, and that there was incitement for homegrown terrorists to attack the people on the list. We have concerns about some of the awful outcomes that might result if we do not tread carefully in this space.

I am also advised that private briefings on these sensitive matters have been offered to the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. But this offer, as I understand it, has not been taken up.

Mrs Peulich — I've been waiting for six weeks and heard about it two days ago, thank you.

Ms SYMES — I understand that the invitation remains open, and I would certainly encourage those parties to come together and engage in an exchange of information, which we would argue would be forthcoming but not something that should be done in public. This would be a sensitive briefing, and I think that invitation would be open to all parties in terms of contact with the office of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. He is very happy to conduct those private briefings to other members of the chamber, particularly those that have carriage of the portfolios that we are talking about. In that vein as well I would say that, for a discussion of a motion talking about these topics, it might be best to follow a briefing of that sort because that means the parties that are determining the terms of reference for such a committee are educated about what is out there, are educated about the consequences of having these discussions in public and may in fact come to a better set of words that, one, produce a better outcome; two, protect those that may be unwillingly brought into such an inquiry; and finally, help the Parliament to deliver a better outcome for the community.

The motion goes to the function and operation of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, so I just wanted to talk about the role that the VMC plays here in Victoria and just highlight that it is an independent statutory body constituted under the Victorian — —

Mrs Peulich — No budget of its own, no staff of its own, no strategic plan. There is nothing independent about it.

Ms SYMES — I think Ms Kapalos would be quite concerned that there are members of Parliament who do not consider her office to be independent. We certainly support the independent statutory authority to go about its business. The Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 actually sets out its independence and sets out its objectives, which are in section 7 of the act. I will just run through some of them:

The objectives of the Commission are to —

...

(e) promote unity, understanding and harmony among Victoria's diverse communities ...

(f) promote a better understanding of Victoria's diverse communities ...

(g) promote interaction between individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds ...

...

(i) promote the rights and responsibilities of citizenship as a unifying force that strengthens our diverse multicultural community ...

The commission is represented on a number of committees and task forces, including the Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce, the chief commissioner's Human Rights Strategic Advisory Committee, the Social Services Taskforce, the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multicultural Affairs and the Multifaith Advisory Group. The commission has provided policy input on a diverse range of topics, including developing community resilience indicators in collaboration with VicHealth and engagement with the Islamic Council of Victoria on matters impacting our youth.

In 2015–16 the commission published a report, *Engaging Our Youth: Our Future*, based on widespread consultation with young people from diverse backgrounds. These activities occurred against a backdrop of continuous engagement with diverse communities to promote social cohesion through the support of diverse communities' cultural heritage and the celebrations of diversity expressed through festivals and cultural events sponsored by the commission.

The independence is guaranteed under the act, and I will just elaborate on the legislative functions and roles. There were recent machinery of government changes to the multicultural affairs portfolio in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and it has increased and broadened support to the independence of this body. The new structure and the revised alignment and access to additional resources have ensured that the VMC is better equipped to deliver strategic priorities and

strengthen the voice of all of our multicultural communities in Victoria.

The chairperson and commissioners of the VMC are supported by staff within the multicultural affairs and social cohesion division of DPC to deliver the VMC objectives that I outlined earlier. The recent structural changes have maintained the independence of the VMC through the articulation of the roles and responsibilities of the new office of VMC and the branches within the new multicultural affairs and social cohesion division to ensure that it continues the provision of high-quality support for the body.

There is also a current memorandum of understanding on protocols between DPC and VMC to further support and enhance that independence of the VMC. Mrs Peulich might be pleased to know that they have recently been updated, which I am sure can be part of her private briefing that she is going to take up in due course.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, in relation to the structures — being mindful of the fact that we may get to 5.00 p.m. without an opportunity to correct that — I am just looking at the website where it refers to an 'Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship', including its functions. So there we go. Update the website.

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

Ms SYMES — Mrs Peulich's motion also goes to the Research Institute on Social Cohesion, also known as the RIOSC, and I would just like to make some comments in relation to that.

Governments around the world acknowledge that there are significant gaps in our understanding as to why people are drawn to violent extremism. For this reason the task force established the Research Institute on Social Cohesion to help build the evidence base and develop online communication of practice to support the work of the task force. The task force allocated \$4 million over four years for research projects, and as of February there were 257 members of the RIOSC following an application process.

On 3 July the third round of the research grants will open. That will be open for a few weeks, and people are encouraged to apply for research grants in that round. There is \$500 000 available for projects. People can apply for up to \$75 000 each for those projects, lasting for 12 months, and their outcomes are expected by the end of 2018. There is an expert reference group that is in place to support the Research Institute on Social

Cohesion's ongoing activities and that includes some very esteemed individuals.

In relation to the task force that is also mentioned in Mrs Peulich's motion, in particular in paragraph 3, as I have explained it is one of those very sensitive topics that is better dealt with in private for the reasons that I have outlined. I have got the details that I can provide to the house, but it is more at the macro level than the specifics.

Initiatives of the task force include community support group pilots, which are to deliver context-specific responses to help prevent people from being drawn to violent extremism, including right-wing extremism, by addressing the underlying factors which make people vulnerable. Pilots are co-designed with local communities where appropriate. The task force also has an initiative in relation to employment assistance through the Jobs Victoria Employment Network to support people from less resilient cohorts in finding employment. There are grants for community-led projects, most of which will help build the resilience of Muslim young people, including through working with Muslim mothers. There is the development of a resource and delivery of training for frontline staff on awareness of violent extremism and a competitive research grants program designed to build the evidence base about how to strengthen social cohesion and prevent violent extremism in Victoria. The funding also supported the first forum for the Research Institute on Social Cohesion.

In addition the task force achievements for 2016–17 have included the development of a research-informed communication strategy, which resulted in the Victorian. And Proud of It campaign, along with a community resilience grants program to enable innovative community-led responses to hate speech. Further on the specific initiatives of the task force, those projects that I mentioned are funded at the macro level.

Coming back to the Victorian. And Proud of It campaign, that campaign was launched along with the multicultural policy statement in February. Many of us would have seen the Vicky bus out the front of Parliament. Vicky is short for 'Victoria'. Vicky is an interactive community engagement truck, and it was launched in May of this year. Vicky promotes the Victorian. And Proud of It campaign and the Victorian values statement, which underpin the government's multicultural policy statement. The campaign is about our shared values and features stories of real Victorians who contribute to our community. I had the benefit of visiting the truck at lunchtime today, and I would urge anybody who sees Vicky out in the street to do so. I

have heard that she goes to football games and the Royal Melbourne Show. She gets around a bit. As I was explaining to the advisers in the box, she certainly has a slightly more active social life than I do at the moment. But I did have the pleasure of spending some time in Vicky this afternoon. The first thing that you notice with Vicky are the smiling faces that represent all of the multicultural communities in Victoria — and there are lots of smiling faces.

Ms Shing — There are lots of smiling faces in the chamber.

Ms SYMES — There are, but there are more smiling faces in the bus than in the chamber, Ms Shing. There are some lovely staff who, when you enter, are there to talk to you about the policy framework of the government. Really importantly they tell the story of some of the people from multicultural backgrounds in Victoria. I only saw one story, and it was of a young man called Ilias, who lives in Bonbeach. This young man is part of Life Saving Victoria. His story told how he was a refugee and how he came to our state not knowing anyone or having a big family network. His story was about joining a club and how he is contributing to the community. This is a young man who could not swim before he turned up at the lifesaving club. It is a really nice story about how diverse we are and how different people are making Victoria a better place in which to live.

Not only does it contain good stories, it is actually a really fun and interactive truck. There are virtual reality goggles that you put on, and you are in a little egg chair that moves around. If you have not experienced the benefit of virtual reality goggles, headphones and spinning chairs before, not only are there really good messages being presented to people in there, it is actually quite fun. I happened to be in there at the same time as some younger people — gen Y some might refer to them as — and they were all pretty rapt with the technology that they got to experience. I would encourage anyone to check out Vicky when they see her — pay her a visit and chat to the staff.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms SYMES — Did you go and have a look at it today?

Mrs Peulich — When you provide assistance for jobs in education, let us know.

Ms SYMES — I outlined the jobs and education programs from the task force.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Mrs Peulich, you had the opportunity to speak, and I think you used the full 50 minutes. You will have the right of reply. I appreciate your interjection, and you will have the right of reply later on.

Ms SYMES — Moving on from Vicky, I would sincerely encourage all members of the public to pay her a visit when they see her at one of the many venues that she is at. If you do not take my word or Mrs Peulich's word for it, maybe just check her out yourself and form your own view. There are some really good messages coming out of Vicky.

As I have said, the task force is doing really important work. It involves a really complex set of issues. There are no easy solutions or clear answers. As there is no clear path to violent extremism, you cannot really have one clear solution to it. There is a combination of causes. You have got to look at all of the drivers that might draw people to pursue this course. That is why it is really important that we have invested a lot of money and a lot of effort and are very committed to addressing violent extremism in our community and persuading those that may be attracted to that avenue that it is not the right course.

There is a lot going on. As I have said, there are lots of things that should be discussed, not so much in the public realm, but that is not to say that there is not a lot of work going on. For that reason you have got to have an evidence-informed approach to co-designing solutions with communities and other stakeholders. All that work is continuous; it is evolving and ongoing. This is not something that stops still.

We do not support the motion in its current form. We believe it will undermine the effectiveness of the work that is being done by a great many people to prevent violent extremism in communities and importantly our work with Victoria Police. It is important to point out that the Chief Commissioner of Police, Graham Ashton, said earlier this year that protecting social harmony requires constant vigilance and, more than that, it requires a commitment from us all — police, government and business. We are certainly committed to the sentiment of the chief commissioner's comments.

As I said, we believe it would be irresponsible to allow the motion in its current form to end up informing a parliamentary committee inquiry. We think that it is too sensitive a topic in its current form.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms SYMES — We would like to avoid the politics of this, Mrs Peulich. We are more focused on outcomes

than the politics of this. As I have said, I would encourage Mrs Peulich to take up that offer —

Mrs Peulich — I have been waiting for six weeks.

Ms SYMES — That is good. You are obviously going to take up the offer of that briefing. I am sure that Minister Scott's staff will pass on your enthusiasm, and I am sure that that will be set up sooner rather than later.

I would like to conclude. We will not be supporting the motion in its current form. It is an important topic to continue discussions on, but in its current form it will not be supported by the government.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: *Local Government — 2015–16 Audit Snapshot*

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to make a few comments on the *Local Government 2015–16 Audit Snapshot*. Local government is something that many of us are passionate about. It does some good things, but we always want to see it doing better things. As we know, 79 councils preside over many, many assets. Metropolitan councils, interface councils, regional cities, large shires, small shires — there is a lot of diversity in our councils in terms of size, constituencies and demographics, the sorts of councillors that are on them, what they see as priorities and so forth. It has always been a challenge to compare the performance of councils in various areas of endeavour, and that is why these audit snapshots are so important. In particular when it comes to financial sustainability, the work that the Auditor-General's office has done has always added to our understanding, but there are other areas that I think also need to be reported on in a standardised and regular fashion. I have always been a supporter of key performance indicators of local government being reported with a standardised form of reporting so that people can actually assess their performance.

One of the areas where I would like to see some standardisation is in the reporting of councillor and mayoral expenses. A lot of the time the way that records are kept misrepresents costs that may be associated in particular with mayoral offices, which are actually corporate governance costs, as personal costs of councillors — or expenses. In particular I would like to refer to a matter raised by the member for Frankston in the Legislative Assembly on 23 March 2016 in

relation to a councillor and former mayor of Frankston, Darrel Taylor. The member for Frankston reported that in 2013–14:

... Cr Taylor spent three times as much as any other councillor, with \$21 626 of ratepayers money spent on personal expenses.

He also claimed:

In the 2014–15 financial year Cr Taylor managed to spend twice as much in ratepayer funds on himself as anyone else did. Ratepayers paid \$25 371 in expenses for Cr Darrel Taylor ...

That is what was said. The member for Frankston stated that former councillor and mayor Darrel Taylor spent \$46 997 in personal expenses in those two years.

Unfortunately that is wrong. Section 75C of the Local Government Act 1989 clearly outlines that councils must provide the basic resources and facilities in order for a councillor to fulfil their function and role as a councillor. Documents that I have recently looked at from the City of Frankston clearly outline the facts surrounding the figures inaccurately cited by the member for Frankston. Firstly, it was and still is Frankston City Council's policy to lump all of the costs of the mayoral budget, which are not necessarily incurred by the mayor or for his use, regardless of the purpose of the cost or who utilised what was purchased, be it the mayor's office or other councillors, as a cost of the mayor. I think that is an injustice that needs to be rectified.

Secondly, former councillor and mayor Darrel Taylor's actual claimed expenses totalled \$5955.11 for the financial year 2013–14 and a further \$5094.37 for the financial year 2014–15. This is one-quarter of what was attributed to him by the member for Frankston.

We need better reporting of personal expenses and that of mayoral expenses which are associated with the mayoral office. A breakdown of the City of Frankston's figures clearly outlines that every dollar was either for the councillor's office, other councillors or expenses relating directly to his role as a councillor and mayor.

In his statement the member for Frankston sought action from the Minister for Local Government, and I quote:

... it is for her to consider including in the Local Government Act review the compulsory publication of councillor expenditure.

I agree, but I think it should be a standardised format with a clear understanding that perhaps the Auditor-General may assist with what needs to be

reported on so that innocent people are not lumbered with the costs of others or the cost of an organisation because there is a little bit of a shifting of costs when it comes to doing the annual accounts. I want to see that standardised.

I call on the Minister for Local Government to introduce a reporting standard that should be applied so that councillors and mayors are not being held responsible for facilities and resources that are provided as set out in section 75C of the Local Government Act and to ensure that claimed expenses are reported separately from those provided under section 75. There are some councils in Victoria where the mayor or in some cases all councillors also have credit cards. I think that is outrageous. Credit cards should be banned; they should not be used. I call on the Minister for Local Government to stop councillors and mayors from having access to credit cards as well.

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2017–18

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — I rise to comment on the Victorian state budget papers 2017–18 and note how utterly disappointing that budget was for western Victoria and indeed more specifically for some of the projects listed in Ballarat, the GovHub being one that will not do what the government has said it would in terms of economic impact. It is disappointing that the government has not seen fit to commit to doing what the previous government did — that is, relocating VicRoads to Ballarat.

I step away slightly from the GovHub and move across to another project funded in the budget, being the Ballarat railway station precinct upgrade. This is another project that has caused significant concern within the local community as a result of the watering down of a good plan that was again developed by the former government — I think it has been referred to in the past as Mr Ramsay's plan — for the railway station precinct. Mr Ramsay certainly was heavily involved in that, and I was pleased to be involved in that process as well.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr MORRIS — I think I was the mayor at that time, Mr Ramsay, that is right.

But what we have seen is that this government has watered down this plan. They have decided to try to develop this plan in a hotchpotch way, and this has driven the community to create a group called SOS — Save Our Station. This group is working very well in

holding the government to account for not keeping their election commitments in relation to what has been an abysmal project. It made commitments prior to the election but has stepped away from them post the election. That personifies this government. It says one thing before the election — like promising not to introduce any new taxes or charges — and then the moment it is elected it does the exact opposite.

However, during some debate on the Urban Renewal Authority Victoria Amendment (Development Victoria) Bill 2016 I may have got a little waylaid and discussed the railway precinct in some depth. I note that during that time Ms Pulford, the minister responsible for the railway station precinct, did say that she very much enjoyed debating this matter with me and she was prepared to debate it anywhere, anytime. I would like to take Ms Pulford up on that particularly kind offer. I would like to have a debate with Ms Pulford about the merits of the government's plan, or lack thereof, and have the debate open to the public. It would be an opportunity for the minister to attempt to sell the government's plan to the community and an opportunity for the community to ask some questions of the minister and have an open and frank discussion about the development of this particular precinct, because there are significant concerns. If the government and the minister are so sure this is such a great idea, then I am sure they would welcome the opportunity to be involved in a public debate about the future of the railway precinct.

I extend that offer to Ms Pulford. I would be very happy to find a neutral venue to have a debate, open to the public, where both Ms Pulford and I could put forward some views and opinions and take some questions from the assembled concerned citizens about the railway station precinct. I am sure there are many qualified and eminent moderators in Ballarat who would be willing to moderate such an event. It is something that I would certainly look forward to being involved in. I am quite sure Ms Pulford would relish that opportunity to be able to sell the government's plan, so I extend an invitation to Ms Pulford to have a debate about the future of the railway station precinct.

We could find a neutral venue, and I am sure there would be many members of the community who would be willing to come along to such an event, voice their views and concerns and have it out about the future of an incredibly important part of Ballarat's central business district and indeed the future direction of our great city. We know that investment in that precinct is important, but what is even more important is that it is done properly the first time, because if it becomes a dog's breakfast the community is going to have to live

with that for time immemorial — well into the future. That is something that I certainly would not like to see, so I hope Ms Pulford will take me up on this very kind offer I have extended.

Consumer Affairs Victoria: report 2015–16

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the *Consumer Affairs Victoria Annual Report: 2015–16*. In doing so I would like to thank Simon Cohen, the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria and deputy secretary, regulation, Department of Justice and Regulation, and consumer affairs officers for their preparation of the report, which reflects the commitment to and passion of Consumer Affairs Victoria for our state.

Victoria's consumer affairs regulators work to promote their vision of a fair and competitive marketplace for everyone in Victoria. Their goals are to ensure that businesses are compliant with consumer laws, that Victorians exercise their consumer rights, that there is a fair and safe rental market for Victorians, that there is a modern and effective consumer law framework and that they are a sustainable and innovative regulator.

Among the many functions that Consumer Affairs Victoria performs for Victorians on a regular basis is reviewing and advising the Victorian government on the consumer protection framework and providing information and advice to consumers, tenants and businesses, to name a few. It registers and licenses businesses and occupations, conciliates disputes between consumers and traders and tenants and landlords, and overall ensures compliance with consumer laws.

The report outlines some of the many things Consumer Affairs Victoria achieved in the year 2015–16 whilst exceeding all of its performance targets and providing services to hundreds of thousands of Victorian businesses, consumers and others. The report also outlines that Consumer Affairs Victoria has made it easier for incorporated associations to manage their affairs efficiently with the introduction of myCAV, an online transaction portal which has processed an additional 18 000 registration and licensing transactions — a 25 per cent increase on last year.

In addition to the efforts of Consumer Affairs Victoria to assist businesses to comply with consumer laws, it has also effectively provided information and services to Victorians to enable them to exercise their consumer rights. The site has been visited over 3.5 million times in this reporting period as people search the website for information in regard to consumer matters. It has been

able to reach hundreds of thousands of people through its social media platform being accessible to everyone. Consumer Affairs Victoria has been able to provide information and advice to almost 350 000 callers through its telephone service, and it has responded to over 60 000 written and online queries, ensuring that all Victorians are taken care of. One of its other many achievements has been providing intense assistance to 40 000 Victorians in need under its consumer and tenancy assistance and financial counselling programs.

Consumer Affairs Victoria plays a vital role in the regulation and consumer law framework. In this reporting period it made progress in ensuring that the consumer law framework has continued to evolve with a fast-paced and changing market. For example, two pieces of important legislation — to establish a new building dispute resolution service and to provide the framework for a rooming house operators licensing scheme to protect residents — have received royal assent.

Once again I would like to thank everyone at Consumer Affairs Victoria for providing high-quality service to assist our Victorian community and help us to grow and succeed as a state. I commend the report to the house.

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning: rate capping policy

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I would like to make some comments on the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning's fourth report into rate capping policy. I do note, though — I am glad Mr Davis, who is chair of this committee, is here — that there are some very nice photos of the committee membership inside the report but sadly no photos of participating members. Given I have spent some time providing quorums for that committee, I thought we might at least get an honourable mention but sadly not. But having said that, I do commend the work that the committee has done and the chair, obviously, in leading that committee to deliver its fourth report into rate capping.

I do note a recommendation in the report in relation to the move to annual valuations and the impact that will have particularly on regional councils, which do not have the capacity to bear the burden of the additional costs of the valuation process and also obviously the potential loss of valuers out of those councils if that role is to be centralised in the office of the valuer-general. This has been widely discussed in the debate on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017. I note that even in the finding and recommendation on page 9 the committee seeks a statement from the government that

places in the public domain the number of valuers employed by councils in Victoria that will be made redundant and what the cost will be to each council of any such redundancies. I am looking forward to the response of the government in relation to that recommendation.

As the chair has indicated in his foreword, which I have read closely, there are a number of issues emerging around the sustainability of rural and regional councils, and I note the standing committee has done a lot of work in this area through its rate capping inquiry, going out to regional meetings and discussing with interface councils their concerns about their costs and about funding that was given to them in the previous government but is now being reduced considerably by this current government. I also note that there is a joint parliamentary committee actually looking at the long-term sustainability of regional councils. This is an important issue for local councils right across Victoria, but specifically I want to note that the regional councils have less capacity to raise revenue than many metro councils.

The example I would like to use, given I am referring to the valuations, is an issue around the Ararat Rural City Council. The farmers in that particular ratepayer base are facing a significant financial burden with the removal of the 55 per cent rate differential for farms. My understanding is that a meeting next week will determine the outcome of the submission process the council has gone through, and if in fact the council does decide to remove the differential, that will mean costs anywhere between \$60 000 and \$100 000 per farmer — an additional cost to their rate burden. This is big bickies for the farming community if in fact they lose their differential, and my hope is that common sense will play a part in the deliberations. If in fact it does not, obviously there are other opportunities for the ratepayers to take the matter up with the minister directly.

No doubt annual valuations will again create more of a cost burden for councils like Ararat Rural City that do not have a huge capacity to raise revenue, and I note that in this report the loss of the country roads and bridges program has been identified as something that has put pressure on regional councils. The timing of the variation process has been noted in the report. The water service charges have been noted in relation to the City of Yarra, particularly the introduction of a waste service charge as part of its 2017–18 budget. There is in part 3.7 a finding in relation to the City of Yarra and the proposed waste service charge which I encourage people to note.

The report notes that more transparency is needed in relation to how the landfill levy is being spent by the government, and it notes the issues around the interface councils, as I said, in particular in relation to the reduction in their funding through the levy process. There is the issue around the reindexation of the commonwealth financial assistance grants, which are very important to local councils; there is an issue around road maintenance, which many of the regional councils brought to the hearings; and I could go on.

It is important work that the standing committee is doing in relation to continually reporting to the Parliament on what impact the rate capping policy is having on our councils right across Victoria.

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2017–18

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate tonight on reports with respect to the state budget 2017–18. One of the major omissions, we believe, from the state budget is sufficient focus on preventing crime and ensuring that the community is safer. In fact all the evidence is that under this government the community has become much less safe. In my own electorate of Glen Eira the rate of reported crime is up 45.2 per cent since the change of government. In Monash it is 18.2 per cent up. In Stonnington it is more than 20 per cent up.

On Monday of this week I attended a forum that was hosted by traders in South Yarra, particularly the Toorak Road traders group. There were a number of very senior police there. I welcome that, and I am very respectful of their contribution, but you could only read between the lines in a lot of what they were saying. It was very clear that there are real concerns amongst many of those traders and local community members, and the police themselves are clearly very concerned. There is a resourcing issue — there are not enough local resources and a concentration of resources is occurring with a lot of these police-focused resourcing decisions. The state government is not providing sufficient capacity or enabling police to do the work that they need to do.

It is very clear that along Toorak Road a massive number of crimes have occurred — violent crimes and very distinct crimes. We know that the Apex gang has been involved in a number of these, and in the jewellery store robberies that occurred along that strip it has been horrific to see captured on the CCTV footage a number of members of the Apex gang smashing through stores. A number of those jewellery stores have been robbed multiple times. Indeed whilst the forum was on last

night there were further robberies occurring in other shops and buildings in and around that exact precinct. There were in fact two further crimes committed in exactly the period when the forum was in operation.

Some people do not believe that the Apex gang is active. I note that Jason Ball, who I think still works for Mr Hibbins in the Legislative Assembly, said on 22 April 2017, ‘Apex is fake news’. That was out on Twitter. He actually said, ‘Apex is fake news’. In Prahran along Toorak Road people know that Apex is not fake news. They know that this is a very serious problem. The police on Monday night gave very clear advice about how to respond if your car is carjacked — the soft touch from behind — do not get out of the car; call 000. If you have children in the car, you are advised to lock the doors, because you do not want to get out of the car and have a thug get in and take off in the car. These are very serious matters, and frightening facts were imparted.

The government has failed to respond to this properly, and there is a failure, I think, of some local members, and Mr Hibbins in the Legislative Assembly comes to mind very strongly here. He has made statements before in which he has said the Greens have always opposed mandatory sentencing. He says we cannot simply use incarceration as a way out of the problem of crime and that we need to strengthen our non-custodial sentencing options. He voted against the no body, no parole bill that went to the lower house, and he ought not to have voted against that bill. The decisions he has made are just completely wrong. It is a very unfortunate approach. Clearly his staff are out indicating that the Apex gang is fake news, and that is clearly false.

I pay tribute to the decision of Ed O’Donohue in bringing to this chamber today the Crimes Amendment (Ramming of Police Vehicles) Bill 2017. That is a very important step. We are taking a clear stance on a long list of items — better bail conditions, stronger parole arrangements and some clear sentencing arrangements. That will make it very clear that in cases where police vehicles are rammed there will be clear penalties. There has been an increase in the number of occasions when police vehicles have been rammed in the last two years. This is a sign of how extraordinary the crime situation has become in Victoria and how the failure of the government to deal with these crimes —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Mr Davis, your time has expired.

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2017–18

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I also rise to speak on the budget papers, and I raise the issue of the budget for policing in Victoria. Like Mr Davis I wish to speak on the recent crime tsunami that is engulfing Victoria and engulfing my electorate. I will start out by speaking about the Greater Shepparton local government area, where crime is up 15.36 per cent. In fact twice this week, on Saturday 17 June and on Tuesday 20 June, we had major stories in our local newspaper about crime. On Saturday the police were on the front page of the paper, warning that more than 40 cars had been broken into during the past month in Shepparton.

Crime is out of control. We see that particularly when we read Tuesday's paper, where there is a story about police arresting a man in a manhunt at Toolamba. This particular person had allegedly committed a string of break-ins over the past three months while he was on bail. This is a theme that comes through time and time again, that this government is not dealing with crime and that people are committing crimes even while they are out on bail or parole. The story goes on to allege that in the past month he had broken into the Fruitworks in Corio Street and stolen \$700 in cash. He is facing 65 charges dating from April until June this year. The article also says that in the final few weeks of the crime spree he allegedly had stolen a number of guns, including a .22 semiautomatic rifle. The total value of the things this person has allegedly stolen while he has been on bail is \$100 000. That is particularly concerning to the Greater Shepparton community, where crime over the past two years under the Andrews government is up 15.36 per cent.

I would like to talk particularly about Tatura and Mooroopna. Both have police stations but both communities find that their police stations are closed most of the time. This is largely due to the government's two-up police policy, which has halved the number of patrols that the police can do and meant they can no longer man the stations while they are out on those patrols. This is causing enormous concern in the Mooroopna and Tatura communities, but particularly in Tatura where we have had a number of forums on crime. The police have held one; I have held one; and the police have scheduled another one for next month. The Minister for Police, after I called for her to visit Tatura, recently did visit. Unfortunately she did not hold a meeting to meet with the community so that they could raise their concerns.

Crime over the last two years in Tatura is up by 36.9 per cent. There have been a number of home break-ins. There was an aggravated burglary at the Hill Top golf club in Tatura. There was a significant issue when the basketball stadium had to be put in lockdown and children's lives were feared for while people waited for police to come from Shepparton, half an hour away. A handbag was snatched in broad daylight. Again, the police had to come from Shepparton. There have been five businesses broken into. The community are concerned about hooning. They are concerned about antisocial behaviour and property damage. In fact one lady who lives in Hogan Street said that at night she battens down her place, but she can hear the destruction going on around the main street of Tatura.

Other areas in my electorate that have had a significant increase in crime over the past two years under the Labor government are Benalla, up 15.52 per cent; Campaspe, up 24.65 per cent; Gannawarra, up 19.93 per cent, Greater Bendigo, up 23 per cent; and Greater Shepparton, I have already talked about. Hume is up 24.76 per cent; Macedon Ranges is up 21.29 per cent; Mansfield, 6.73 per cent; Mildura, 13.73 per cent; Mitchell, 40.62 per cent; Moira, 41.95 per cent; Mount Alexander, 23.62 per cent; Murrindindi, 9.41 per cent; Nillumbik, 34.75 per cent; Strathbogie, 32.24 per cent; Swan Hill, 1.87 per cent; Towong, 16.41 per cent, Wangaratta, 3 per cent; Whittlesea, over 20 per cent; Wodonga, up about 2.5 per cent; and Yarra Ranges is up 24.5 per cent.

Crime in our community is a significant issue. It is something that this government needs to turn its mind to and put in place law and order policies that will address the crime tsunami in Victoria.

INAUGURAL SPEECH

Mr Gepp

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) — Thank you, President, and I thank the house for allowing me to make my first contribution to the Parliament.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to elders past and present.

As you can imagine, I have received much well-meaning advice about what should be in this speech today. Not surprisingly that advice has been everything from be apolitical to go hard, and with all the variations in between. I am sure what I am about to say tonight will please some and fall short of the expectations of others. That is okay. I am certain it will

not match the light on the hill or the Redfern or misogyny speeches of past Labor luminaries, but I will have a crack anyway.

Up-front I want to acknowledge my Aunty Gladys in the gallery today. She is an octogenarian and a stalwart of the Labor Party. She is still president of her Labor branch, and they are managing tonight without her as she has come here to hear my inaugural speech. When I called her to tell her that I had won preselection and would be entering Parliament, she had two things to say to me. First, she said she hoped that I would know when it was time to go, which I did have a bit of a chuckle about. I thought: can I get in there first? The second thing that she said to me was, 'Never forget where you came from'. And I will come back to that theme a little bit later.

All of us here of course have built on the work of others who have gone before us. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of my predecessor, the Honourable Steve Herbert, and congratulate Steve on his 17-year parliamentary career.

Northern Victoria is an area of this great state that continues to be an integral part of my family's life. We have a lengthy history through the goldfields of Bendigo, Castlemaine, Newstead and down through to Woodend. Many of us continue to live in these towns today. My mum and my stepfather along with three of my four siblings moved to Bendigo when I was a teenager. Mum remained in Bendigo until she lost her battle with breast cancer some 15 years ago. My younger sister Kathy still lives there today with her family, and my older sister Julie is just down the road at Woodend.

Bendigo, I am pleased to say, is also the place where I married my wife Sue. Sue's family have been a part of the Castlemaine and Newstead communities for well over a century, working in a variety of jobs including farming and local government. I think it was a very proud day for her family when recipes from her grandmother's cookbook were featured in the Newstead Historical Society centennial publication.

Of course the electorate of Northern Victoria Region is much larger and much more diverse than just the goldfields area, spanning over 100 000 square kilometres. Largely rural, it showcases some of the best produce and agriculture that Victoria offers — winegrowing, near and dear to my colleague Jac Symes's heart — and features the Murray River and alpine areas, its lakes and ski resorts, all supporting a vibrant tourism industry.

Tonight I hope that the people of Northern Victoria Region will get a sense of who I am and what they can expect from me as their MP. Like all of us, I have been shaped by my life's experiences, and mine is not a particularly remarkable story. I was born at the Royal Women's Hospital in Carlton, although I am pretty sure that Dad would have relocated the hospital to Richmond if he could. He did not care very much for anything Carlton, and I have got to confess, nor do I.

My earliest memories of our life in the housing commission flats in Flemington include Mum calling from a window from a couple of floors up for my big sister Julie and me to finish playing with the other kids from the flats and come inside for tea. It is also where I went to school for my first time at St Brendan's in Flemington, and life just seemed pretty normal. As the family expanded, our next move was to a larger public housing property in Reservoir, where we stayed for a few years until, unfortunately, Mum and Dad parted ways. From there, with five kids on the scene and in tow, we moved around, including interstate, before landing in Bendigo. Mum had remarried and we formed a bigger blended family with five step-siblings added to the mix.

It was about this time that I really became aware that we did not have much money. Up until then everybody else just seemed to be in the same boat, so life did not seem to be any different for us from anybody else. But it was also at that time that I started to notice the impact that this had on our lives. There were school excursions we could not go on and community activities that we could not participate in. There were so many of us now that it just made the cost of participation prohibitive, or the older kids simply had to stay home to look after the younger ones while Mum was at work. It was starting to dawn on me that we were missing out on opportunities simply because Mum just did not have enough money. I did not understand then and I do not understand now how a child's education or participation in their community should be limited because there is not enough money in their mother's bank account.

I do not tell this story from a sense of bitterness or resentment, but from the perspective that these are the life experiences which formed me and helped me know what matters. On the upside, those shared experiences had the great benefit of creating an unbreakable bond between me and my siblings. They have got beautiful families, and we are very proud of each other.

Growing up we all fell in love with sport, particularly footy and netball. While we moved around a lot, sport was a wonderful way to be a part of the community.

Today sport plays such an important role in the lives of many Victorians, as we know, particularly in northern Victoria. It can provide an important bridge to overcome some of those inequalities that exist in our communities. I know from personal experience that sport allowed me to forget just for a bit, for a little while, the challenges that our family faced, because on the field when we were playing I was just like any other kid.

I left Bendigo after sitting the public service entrance exam and was subsequently offered a job in the tax office. I was immediately attracted to the local union, the tax office's branch of the Federated Clerks Union, which subsequently became the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). In my first few months at work the union always talked about an agenda that included better pay, better conditions, safer workplaces, worker training, education and tackling inequality.

I had not had much exposure to unions up until this point in my life, but their agenda resonated with me. It just made sense to me that we could improve people's lives through wage rises, improved conditions and access to the opportunities that inevitably come from education and training. The union also rejected the idea that inequality was just something that we had to accept as normal — something that had become my normality. It was also eye-opening to me that the union wanted me involved and was interested in my views. My involvement did not depend on how much money I had in my pocket, so I was sold. Around the same time something else caught my eye in the tax office: it was a young woman from revenue control on the 11th floor. Her name was Sue, and we have never been apart.

But back to the union. About five years into my tax career it began to stagnate. Other than my role as a workplace delegate for the union and as a member of the local branch executive I really did not settle in the tax office. I was not particularly happy and I left. But my life changed forever when a few weeks later my old union rang me and offered me the job of full-time organiser. Wasn't that a party stopper, to tell people that you were a union organiser for tax workers? But I was chuffed, I was absolutely chuffed. To be offered the chance to work in an organisation whose values I shared was something I never imagined. Fancy being able to advocate for and represent people who need a hand for a living. I thought I had hit the jackpot, and this work became my vocation. But I am sure if you had told the young man who caught the train from Bendigo to Spencer Street to start work in the tax office that this was the beginning of his life's journey, he would have either been very amused — probably — or very perplexed.

But my love for the union movement grows stronger as unions continue to challenge the causes of inequality. It is the unions campaigning to have domestic violence leave included in enterprise agreements so that victims of these terrible crimes are supported when they need it most. It is unions campaigning to ensure that every worker goes home safely to their family at the end of the working day. These are noble pursuits with both industrial and social benefits, and they mean so much to so many people. I have only thanks and admiration for the mighty Australian trade union movement.

Writing this speech has allowed me to go back in time and remember fondly the people who have had a major influence on me and the friendships that endure today. Firstly, Paul Tregillis. Paul is not here today; he is overseas. He is retired, but I am very proud to say he was here at the joint sitting of Parliament a couple of weeks ago. Paul was my first ever union boss so yes, he was the one who gave me the job as a union organiser so he is to blame for me being here today. Paul taught me countless lessons over many, many years. One particular lesson that always stuck with me was that if you believe in something or someone, then go for it, but treat people with respect because you just never know when you will have to work with them again. Paul is still a hero and a role model to me, and I think he still thinks I work for him.

A host of people provided guidance, support and friendship to me during those early union years — people like Ron Ahern, Phil Collins, Phil Khoury, Fiona Grover, Mary Cucuzza, Graham Clark, Shane O'Connell, who has left us now, Brad Oakes, Les Heimann, Mark Burrell, Gidge Rotunno, Loren Rotunno and Phil Gardiner, who is in the gallery today. I still see many of them today and I thank them for their enduring friendship.

And of course I formed many friendships over the years with some great rank and file members, including with my best mate, Noel, who I am thrilled is here today. It was destiny for me and Noel — two union tragics, two Richmond tragics, we had to come together, and we did form that lifelong bond. We even bought a little boat together. I have got to say though, Noel, I am sorry, clobber, I do not think we will be using it much over the next few years; I think I might be a bit busy on weekends. And contrary to our belief, I have checked with the minister and apparently there are fish in the bay — we are just unlucky. Noel and his beautiful wife, Karen, are here tonight, and along with their kids, Paul and Robert, they are very much a part of our family.

I want to particularly mention Kerry Edsall; again I seem to be speaking about people who are not with us

anymore. Kerry was a young woman who was taken by breast cancer at far too young an age. Kerry was from Clifton Springs on the Bellarine Peninsula, and she was a call centre worker with Centrelink. At the height of WorkChoices Kerry stood tall as a fierce CPSU representative for her fellow workers. It is one thing to be a paid union official during those times but it takes a special kind of courage to take the ultimate political action of standing up in the workplace against your boss when your boss is the government. But Kerry did that, and she was the light on the hill for so many rank and file members. They could have easily left it to others to pursue better pay and conditions but instead they chose to stand with Kerry in pursuit of a better, fairer working environment. And I continue to be inspired by those people every day; people like Kay Densley, Steve Cocker, Russell Foley, Gilbert Potts, Tanya Edlington, Peter Shirres, Barb Johnson, James Batchelor, Gareth Mills and many more.

To my mates at the Finance Sector Union, and many of them are here this afternoon, I thoroughly enjoyed my five years with you after a long stint at the CPSU and particularly the opportunity to pursue some fantastic public policy positions which are still relevant to this state and this nation today. I want to make particular mention of Darren Martin, with whom I worked closely on many of those initiatives, including procurement policy and consumer best interests duty in financial services. Can you believe that in this country today we do not have a consumer best interests test for people who have no choice but to participate in the financial services sector? We also pursued policies that opposed offshoring of jobs and data. Darren is a great leader and an even better human being.

To all of those who supported me in the lead-up to and during preselection, thank you. There are too many of you to mention without leaving someone out, so I will not run that risk, but I do have to particularly mention a couple of people: Tom, Shaun, Kate, Luba, Marg, Shane, Barb and Andrew, thank you very much.

To my siblings Julie, Tony, Kathy and Jamie, none of whom perhaps share my passion for politics — I think I am the black sheep of the family in that regard — despite that their love and support has never wavered, and I thank them for that. At least two of them and their families are now constituents of mine, so I guess the real test will be whether they tick '1' for Mark Gepp and Jac Symes in the future, and I hope they do.

All of us in this place know how important the support of family and friends is when it comes to doing what we do. I have to let you all down gently — I have the best. My kids Amanda and Daniel are fine young

people. You are kind, compassionate and empathetic, and your Mum and I could not be prouder. We are also proud of our little mate Landen, who is our most favourite kid in the whole wide world. If you are watching this Landen, good boy. I will not dwell on everything my wife Sue means to me — firstly, because I will not get to the end of it but also because I could never express it enough. I just say to Sue, I love you and thank you. My final personal acknowledgement is to my dad who we lost 13 years ago. I just wish you were here, Dad.

These are some of the events and some of the people that have led me to today. I believe governments are at their best when they address the inequality that prevents individuals from being their best and reaching their full potential.

I think about the challenges young people in particular face today. Accessing technology and obtaining the skills to use it is crucial. More and more of our young people are leaving the education system with mounting debt. Job security for them is a thing of the past as employment becomes increasingly precarious. Owning a home is a pipedream for many and is more expensive and more difficult than ever before, and real wages have been declining for some time. Indeed the Australian Bureau of Statistics wage price index tells us that at the end of 2016 wages suffered their biggest decline since 2009. At the same time record high company profits surged by more than 20 per cent.

It really is a great honour and privilege to be joining the Andrews Labor government as a member for Northern Victoria Region. This great government is tackling the big issues confronting all Victorians. That is important to me, and I am proud that our government is creating jobs, building infrastructure and implementing progressive health, education and social policies.

Working to address inequality is the ultimate Sisyphean task, and it is why I have worked all my life to give voice to workers and now to the people of northern Victoria. I want you to know, people of northern Victoria and my colleagues in the Labor Party, that every day when I get out of bed I will be focused on addressing inequality and removing the barriers that stand in the way of the opportunity for us all to be our best.

Finally, I want to reassure everyone, but particularly Aunty Glad: I will never forget where I came from. President, thank you for your indulgence. I am ready to go to work.

Honourable members applauded.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will just make two observations. One of them is that I was one of the people who suggested Mr Gepp ought not be provocative. Mark was pretty good, except for his mention of the Richmond Football Club. The other observation is that when you have been a union rep in the tax office, can I suggest that now you are in politics you will probably look back on that as being the high-water mark of your career!

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the house do now adjourn.

Goulburn Valley Health

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and it is regarding the potential decrease in the number of children's beds at Goulburn Valley Health as a consequence of the redevelopment. My request of the minister is that she allocates the additional funding required to ensure the Goulburn Valley Health redevelopment retains the current number of children's beds.

The reduction of paediatric beds at Goulburn Valley Health has long been on the agenda of the Labor Party. Back in 2003 the then Bracks Labor government started a process to cut 16 paediatric beds from Goulburn Valley Health, reducing the number of beds to 12. Unfortunately this government is set to follow in its predecessor's footsteps, with its plan to cut even further the number of paediatric beds during the redevelopment. This would reduce the number of permanent paediatric beds to just eight. This is unacceptable, particularly as a consequence of a hospital redevelopment, which should include planning to service a growing catchment.

The hospital has stated that it will be strongly advocating for 12 beds. The current plans for the redesigned paediatric ward show eight beds, with four extra empty rooms in the ward. These rooms could be used for four extra beds, retaining the current status quo of 12 children's beds, but only if the extra funding can be obtained.

Wherever possible sick children need to be able to be treated close to home. We all know that when we are unwell, we just want to be close to the people and places we know and love and that make us comfortable. This is especially true for children. Can you imagine how distressing it would be to a young child who is

unwell to have to travel some distance to access health services, particularly if Mum or Dad or other carers are not, for work, financial, family or other reasons, able to be there with the child for the duration? The reality is that any reduction to the number of children's beds could result in more young patients being transferred to larger public hospitals elsewhere in the state if the number of beds reaches capacity.

In Greater Shepparton alone, which is just part of the primary catchment of the hospital, there are currently more than 15 500 children under 14 years of age. This equals roughly one bed per every 2000 children in Greater Shepparton alone, without even considering children in outlying catchment areas, so the likelihood of all eight beds being occupied at any given time is extremely likely. My request of the minister is that she allocates the additional funding required to ensure the Goulburn Valley Health redevelopment retains the current number of children's beds.

National disability insurance scheme

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — The matter I wish to raise this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing in the other place in relation to the disability and ageing portfolios. It relates to the men's and women's outreach program and a meeting which I attended at Mitchell House in Wonthaggi on 13 June. This meeting was called by a local disability advocacy group and its members so they could come together to talk about the impact of the national disability insurance scheme on the way in which consumers of disability services could better self-advocate for the things they require to meet their needs and to give them as many opportunities as possible into the future. It was a really educational experience for me hearing people advocate for their own needs and priorities.

In particular I wish to congratulate and commend the efforts of the following people in so well describing what their priorities are now and into the future as we transition towards the national disability insurance scheme. Kev, Paul, Amanda, Barry, Peter, Marnie, Josephine, Emily, Stuart, Philip, Ben, Pete and Andrew, thank you for making it clear to me how you would like to maintain the greatest deal of control over the services and resources that are provided to you and how you would like to make sure that the resources you are allocated will give you the choices and the opportunities that you would like in order to reach your full potential now and into the future.

The action I seek from the minister in this regard is for him to provide confirmation that regional communities

throughout Gippsland and in particular within the Wonthaggi and South Gippsland-Bass Coast areas will be supported as part of their accessing high-quality and accurate information regarding case management resources and transition worker support to enable people to truly transition well and in a way that enables them to harness their full potential as funding under the combined state and federal resources takes effect.

Sudanese community

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter this evening for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The house would be aware that I have on a number of occasions raised my concerns about youth gangs in the western suburbs, particularly in the Tarneit-Werribee area. These youth gangs are predominantly men of Sudanese background. I have expressed on a number of occasions a good deal of concern about the destruction and damage that they have been causing. I have asked on a number of occasions for the government to actually do something about it. Last week I met with a group of —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr FINN — No, not victims in fact, but young Sudanese people. Richard Deng is a Sudanese man who has come to Australia, and I met with him, his sister Becky and Emily Yuille, who is a community worker or activist — if I could use that term — in the Wyndham area. Emily was kind enough to organise this meeting. I also met with Cr Kim McAliney of the Wyndham City Council, and there were a number of other members of the local Sudanese community there as well. This group has taken it upon themselves to deal with these issues and reach out — if I can use that term — to youths who might feel disenfranchised and who might feel the need to get involved in things that the law might frown upon. This group is doing a very, very good job. Not only are they doing such a good job for the local Sudanese community but they have extended their work to help other young people whether they be Sudanese or whatever background. I asked them how long they have been doing this, and they told me they have been doing it for a few years. I asked, ‘How do you do it?’, and they said, ‘We pay for it ourselves out of our own pocket’, and I thought, ‘Well, that’s got to change’.

So what I am doing tonight is asking the minister to provide some funding for this group of great people in Tarneit to allow them to continue to do their work without the out-of-pocket expenses to the extent that they have had to put up with to this point.

Level crossing removal

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Last night I met some members of the Australian Sri Lankan community, who made a strange request for me to pass on to the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan, around the level crossing removal program. It was explained to me that in many cities in Sri Lanka there are no controls at the intersections of trains and roads. The request was for me to see if the equipment that we have taken away could possibly be used on some sites in Sri Lanka. Now, I did not know the answer to that, but I think it would not be a bad thing to explore, so the action I seek from the minister is for her to facilitate a meeting between me, the members of the Australian Sri Lankan community that are interested in this and the CEO of the Level Crossing Removal Authority so that we could perhaps explore if there are any opportunities here.

Construction supplier register

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Treasurer, the Honourable Tim Pallas. The action I seek from the Treasurer is for him to amend the tendering process for demolition works that are conducted within regional communities — for example, in the Latrobe Valley. By providing a fair and equitable framework, local contractors might have a chance to take part in the tendering process on the basis of merit, skills and experience rather than on how much cash flows through their bank accounts. In accordance with government protocols, contractors engaged in the construction industry under the demolition category must visit the Department of Treasury and Finance website and take part in a self-assessment questionnaire to understand their eligibility for becoming part of the construction supplier register.

One of my constituents, who is self-employed and in the construction industry, has walked the path of prequalification a number of times in an endeavour to win local contracts that exceed \$100 000. Before prequalification, applicants are assessed on a number of measures, including technical, financial and occupational health and safety criteria, to ensure they meet the standards that are required by the government. That is fair and reasonable. There is no doubt that we need to make sure that in a demolition process businesses are fit for purpose and fit to do the job to a very high standard. But this constituent after many attempts gave up hope of joining the ranks of the chosen few on the preferred listing.

One of the major impediments was the financial requirements. Not only was this business required to provide evidence of a suitable profitability — which is fair and reasonable — but it was also reported that they had to substantiate the amount of money that the business had in the bank. Yearly turnover and capability were not the preferred criteria, but rather how much money was sitting in the bank. It was a considerable amount.

This is a huge frustration for my constituent. After the prequalification stage the constituent had to substantiate that they had relevant insurance in place and they also had to find financial statements and building practitioner accreditation. So they had to show that they were a viable, responsible and ready-to-go business. After \$2000 in OHS accreditation and after three failed attempts, this local Latrobe Valley business gave up hope of tendering for any of the demolition jobs.

At a time when in the Latrobe Valley it is vital that procurement is sourced through local contractors to create local jobs within the area, it is important that the Treasurer review the construction supplier register and amend the hurdles that prohibit local, positive, reputable contractors from gaining tender opportunities. Contracts should be decided on a contractor's capacity to do the job rather than on how much money they have in the bank. I ask the Treasurer to amend the tendering process and review this important register.

Bowel cancer screening

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — June is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month, and today is Red Apple Day. This is an opportunity to support the work of Bowel Cancer Australia through the purchase of a \$2 apple pin ribbon and through apple-themed fundraising activities.

I want to acknowledge the great work that the former member for Carrum in the Legislative Assembly, Donna Bauer, has done as an ambassador for Bowel Cancer Australia. I know that today, as usual, she has been encouraging other people to know their bodies and be alert to symptoms of bowel cancer, which can be very subtle. Bowel cancer kills about 4000 Australians every year, and it is the second most common cancer for both men and women. Ninety per cent of cases can be successfully treated if they are caught early. However, especially for young people — and that means people aged under 50, which I think is a great definition of 'young' — bowel cancer is usually not caught early; it is detected at stage 3 or 4. Stage 4 is usually fatal, and stage 3 is, hopefully, dodging a bullet. That was in fact my own experience when I was

diagnosed with stage 3 bowel cancer almost exactly three years ago. Despite the effect that a cold is having on my voice today, I am very thankful to be in remission and have been for a long time, and I am in very good health — touch wood.

Survival rates for bowel cancer are relatively low compared to other forms of cancer, which have seen big increases in survival rates in recent years. Breast cancer has a five-year survival rate of 90 per cent and prostate cancer has a five-year survival rate of about 94 per cent, but for bowel cancer the five-year survival rate is 69 per cent. This is a big increase from 1984–88, when the survival rate was 50 per cent, which was horrendously low.

The national bowel cancer screening program and raising individual awareness are the two main ways that early detection is encouraged. If someone presents at their GP with symptoms and that GP recommends a colonoscopy, or if they test positive in the screening program, a colonoscopy is recommended within 30 days. But it seems this usually does not happen within the public health system.

Julian Wiggins, who is CEO of Bowel Cancer Australia, said:

We have known since 2012 that colonoscopy waiting lists are becoming a big issue in the public setting: starting with Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia more recently and, of course, Tasmania.

I am a big believer that what gets measured gets done. The Victorian health services performance data does not include wait times for colonoscopies, and this is a critical test — it saves lives through detection and hopefully early diagnosis, but it is also the process through which polyps, which may develop into cancer, are removed. Therefore the action that I am seeking from the minister is that wait times for colonoscopies in Victorian public hospitals be included in the Victorian health services performance data.

Caulfield–Dandenong line elevated rail

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport, and it concerns the sky rail that is being implemented by the government between Caulfield and Dandenong. This is of course a method of level crossing removal that was not announced before the election in the form that the government is proceeding with it — a rail-over-road solution. Many people in that area, including local traders, were explicitly told that something quite different would occur by local candidates at the time,

and they have every reason to be very angry. Now the station at Murrumbeena is closed for three months. Traders were told and the local community was told that there would not be the sort of lengthy delay that would occur with a rail-under-road solution. They were told that a sky rail would be quicker. In fact what has occurred is a very lengthy delay period, multiple periods of closure and huge impacts on local businesses and of course the local community.

Many of the local businesses are afraid to speak up, and they have communicated with me and indeed with media representatives about their fear and concern about speaking up. Indeed even television crews that visited Murrumbeena on the weekend were shadowed by Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA) employees in some sort of bizarre tailing of them around the shopping centre and nearby. My question is: what is going on there?

My real concern today is for the traders in places such as Murrumbeena and Carnegie. I want to see the government stepping forward with a proper program that supports those traders. It is very clear that to date the government has not done that. A number of traders have gone out of business already. That is a very serious consequence for a small business person, who often has a loan and has their house guaranteed against the business, so the impact on small businesses is extreme.

The government needs to step forward and make sure that small businesses are provided with the support they need so they are not damaged and they are not ruined in this period. They were obviously led to believe that this was going to be a much shorter period, but now many of them are finding that the LXRA, as usual, cannot be trusted. What I seek as an action from the minister is that she investigate the support that is required for small businesses and provide adequate and improved support, because what is being provided now is not adequate.

Moorabbin and Caulfield Little Athletics clubs

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — This is a very important issue because it is affecting some constituents who are in Little Athletics clubs in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region. The adjournment matter I am raising is for the Minister for Sport, Mr Eren, in the other place. As I mentioned, it relates to Little Athletics clubs that are in a situation where there are two areas that are being redeveloped. The Moorabbin track is being redeveloped, and Duncan Mackinnon Reserve in Murrumbeena is also being redeveloped. In relation to what is happening, there is a crossover in the timing of these two redevelopments

which means the Little Athletics clubs will not have anywhere to undertake their activities.

For anyone involved in sporting activities the health and wellbeing benefits are well known and well understood, so this is a bit of a dilemma for these very active athletics groups. The Moorabbin Little Athletics group has around 200 families and around 300 children involved in its group, and the Caulfield Little Athletics club has 340 children and involves 250 families, so that is around 600 children and about 470 families who will have nowhere to go and no track to use while these redevelopments are being undertaken. Moorabbin's redevelopment starts in July and finishes in September, and I am led to believe the Duncan Mackinnon track is scheduled for works from November through to February. Of course that is pending, provided there are no weather interruptions, no works disruptions and nothing else is disrupted. As we know, with some of these projects everything can be in the hands of the weather, which can certainly have a major impact.

The concerns of the clubs are such that if we could push back the start time for one of the redevelopments then it would enable both clubs to have somewhere to go, so the action I seek is that the minister speak to both of the councils that are involved in these areas — Kingston City Council for Moorabbin and Glen Eira City Council for the Duncan Mackinnon Reserve — and ask that the start time be pushed back to accommodate any overruns that might occur and ensure that both clubs will be able to use facilities, so the Caulfield club will be able to use Moorabbin's facilities and the Moorabbin club will then be able to use Caulfield's facilities once their redevelopment commences later in the year. I am hoping my adjournment matter makes sense as it is a very serious issue for these Little Athletics clubs.

Responses

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The adjournment seems to have actually occurred very late at night given the way I heard the contributions from various members today, many of whom forgot to actually indicate which minister they were directing their adjournment matter to until at least two-thirds of the way through their contributions, if at all. Nonetheless, I believe that I was able to glean from Ms Lovell that she is actually seeking the Minister for Health's scrutiny of children services at Goulburn Valley Health.

Ms Shing made it very clear, because in fact she gave the full title for the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing and his other responsibilities in relation to matters relating to self-advocacy and support for people

with disabilities, and sought to make sure that their interests are protected at the time of transition to the national disability insurance scheme.

Mr Finn raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in relation to his support for programs that deal with trying to mitigate the risk of young people taking volatile action or being subjected to radicalisation and potential terrorist activity in Victorian communities.

Mr Leane raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport seeking her facilitation of a meeting between the head of the Level Crossing Removal Authority and representatives of the Sri Lankan community who are interested in the equipment and technology being removed during level crossing removals as potentially an export activity for the state of Victoria, and Mr Leane would be involved in those conversations.

Ms Bath raised a matter for the attention of the Treasurer relating to the way in which local contractors can successfully apply to be given contracts in Gippsland, in particular relating to construction and demolition work across the region.

Ms Fitzherbert raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health seeking her consideration of adding waiting times for colonoscopies to the health reporting data in trying to provide greater awareness of risk and mitigation of bowel cancer in our community.

Mr Davis raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking that she provide opportunities for small business in precincts that are affected by the extensive level crossing removal program to be supported in making adjustments in their business acumen during the life of the redevelopment.

Ms Crozier raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Sport. She wants him to intervene in the rostering arrangements for sporting clubs in McKinnon and Moorabbin in relation to sporting facility redevelopment and to work with councils to provide equal access for Little Athletics clubs in those municipalities.

Beyond that I have written responses to adjournment matters raised by Ms Dunn on 25 May and Mr Davis and Mr Morris on 6 June.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I let Ms Crozier's adjournment matter through, and I got a quizzical look, I think, from the Leader of the Government. It was an unusual one in the sense that it asked the minister to intervene in another level of government — local

government — where that minister does not have direct responsibility for local government.

Ms Crozier — It was a joint partnership. I probably did not express it clearly.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Maybe, but it was close. We need to be careful to make sure that adjournment items cover matters that ministers have direct responsibility for. I took the view that perhaps the breakdown in communication needed an umpire or somebody from outside to actually make things happen. On that basis, the house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.20 p.m.