

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 22 March 2017

(Extract from book 6)

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

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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| Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Corrections | The Hon. G. A. Tierney, MLC |
| Minister for Planning | The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP |
| Cabinet Secretary | Ms M. Thomas, MP |

Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Hartland, Mr Herbert, 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 Elasmarr, Mr Finn, 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 Eideh, #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 Elasmarr, Ms Fitzherbert, #Ms Hartland, Mr Mulino, Mr O’Donohue, 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.

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 Elasmarr 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 D. O’Brien, Mr Pearson, Mr T. Smith and Ms Ward.

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

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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

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Deputy President:

Mr K. EIDEH

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Deputy Leader of the Government:

The Hon. J. L. PULFORD

Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. M. WOOLDRIDGE

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS

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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 |
| Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred | Western Metropolitan | Greens | Somyurek, Mr Adem | South Eastern Metropolitan | ALP |
| Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph | Northern Victoria | ALP | Springle, Ms Nina | South Eastern Metropolitan | Greens |
| Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne | South Eastern Metropolitan | ALP | Symes, Ms Jaelyn | Northern Victoria | ALP |
| Leane, Mr Shaun Leo | Eastern Metropolitan | ALP | Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne | Western Victoria | ALP |
| Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann | Northern Victoria | LP | Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling | Eastern Metropolitan | LP |
| Melhem, Mr Cesar | Western Metropolitan | ALP | Young, Mr Daniel | Northern Victoria | SFFP |

² Appointed 15 April 2015

³ Resigned 27 May 2016

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, 22 March 2017

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

**MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS
AMENDMENT (AFL GRAND FINAL
TICKETS) BILL 2017**

Introduction and first reading

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Major Sporting Events Act 2009 to provide for the AFL Grand Final to be a sports ticketing event and to set out specific ticketing requirements for that event and for other purposes.

Read first time.

**LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY
SAFETY COMMITTEE**

Probationary driving age

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) presented report, including appendices, extracts of proceedings and minority report, together with transcripts of evidence.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report be published.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

The reference for this inquiry came from Mr Purcell, who asked that the committee investigate the impacts of lowering the probationary driving age in Victoria, including assessing the link between the driving age of 18 and youth unemployment in regional areas, and the correlation between a lower probationary driving age and the road toll. The committee was also asked to review the adequacy of transport infrastructure and services available to young people in regional Victoria.

We received over 100 submissions from a broad range of stakeholders, including government departments, road safety research and academic agencies and not-for-profit organisations, but most importantly young people shared their views and experiences with the committee. We held a number of public hearings in secondary schools and tech colleges. This was particularly interesting in the border town of Wodonga,

where the school carpark appeared full of cars with New South Wales number plates.

From the outset there was a clear tension in the evidence. Some wanted to keep the driving age at 18 or even raise it, while others felt that bringing the licensing scheme into line with other states would have a significant benefit on young people's lives and their transition to adulthood. The committee came to the conclusion that licensing is a gateway to mobility for many young people in non-urban areas, and that mobility is essential for young people to access opportunities for their future. The central recommendation of this report is therefore that the probationary driving age in Victoria be lowered to 17 years. I understand that there is a minority report to this recommendation that Mr Eideh may speak on at a later date.

Highlighted throughout the inquiry was the success of Victoria's graduated licensing scheme. It is recognised as one of the most comprehensive in the world, although the committee believes it can be strengthened further and recommends a number of additional requirements, including increasing the requirement for supervised night driving from 10 to 20 hours, changing the peer passenger restriction from one passenger to no passengers for the duration of a probationary 1 licence and restricting P1 drivers from driving between 10.00 p.m. and 5.00 a.m. unless it is for employment, study or other authorised purposes.

Each of these changes reflect widely supported models of best practice. We made a number of other recommendations to assist and enhance young people's transport mobility, be it in their own cars or through other community transport initiatives. It is a broad suite of recommendations that we believe will enhance the transport mobility of young people while introducing new complementary safeguards to ensure Victoria maintains its high standards of road safety.

I would like to thank the chair, Geoff Howard, the member for Buninyong in the other place; our deputy president, Khalil Eideh; and Murray Thompson, Martin Dixon and Natalie Suleyman, the members for Sandringham, Nepean and St Albans in the other place. Thanks also for the great work from the committee secretariat: Yuki Simmonds, Christianne Andonovski and Natalie Lilford. I also thank the staff who left during the inquiry: Andrew Homer, Sarah Terry and John Aliferis. I commend the report to the house.

Motion agreed to.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on —

Effectiveness of the Environmental Effects Statement Process, March 2017 (*Ordered to be published*).

Managing Victoria's Planning System for Land Use and Development, March 2017 (*Ordered to be published*).

MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Aboriginal prisoner rehabilitation

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — I rise to update the house on the Andrews government's programs to strengthen Aboriginal prisoners' cultural connections and reduce recidivism through grants worth almost \$2.5 million. Last Thursday, 16 March, I joined the member for Geelong in the Legislative Assembly, Christine Couzens, at the Aboriginal Justice Forum in Geelong to announce the Kaka Wangity, Wangin-Mirrie Aboriginal cultural program grant recipients. These grants, which will be funded until 2019, are part of the Andrews Labor government's commitment to the Aboriginal justice agreement, building on the work of successive Victorian governments in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. They are designed to drive down the over-representation of Aboriginal people in Victorian prisons, better rehabilitate Aboriginal prisoners and ultimately drive down recidivism amongst Aboriginal offenders. The organisations delivering the culturally focused programs in prisons and community correctional services include the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service, Connecting Home Ltd, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Relationships Australia Victoria.

At the forum I also announced a \$710 000 grant for a continuity of Aboriginal healthcare pilot to be rolled out over the next two years. The pilot will ensure that Aboriginal women exiting the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and men exiting the Dhurringile Prison and the Fulham Correctional Centre will continue to get the care they need as they re-enter the community. The pilot will be delivered by three Aboriginal-run organisations. It might not sound like it, but it certainly is true that ensuring people remain healthy is imperative to ensuring that they stay out of our justice system. Many prisoners who come into our care are in poor health. Ensuring they are accessing health services when they leave our care helps those men and women

continue to keep their life on track, keep out of prison and, hopefully, keep out of trouble.

Men's sheds

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's continued support for men's sheds. Last week whilst visiting Maryborough Men's Shed I announced that the Andrews Labor government would provide \$879 000 in funding for the 2017–18 men's sheds grants program. Maryborough Men's Shed is a fantastic community hub with a great bunch of enthusiastic shedders. It was terrific also to meet shedders from neighbouring men's sheds, such as the Avoca and Newstead men's sheds.

There are over 350 men's sheds across Victoria, helping provide opportunities for men to meet, reconnect and participate in local community initiatives in a safe and inclusive environment. Men's sheds give men of all ages the opportunity to participate in trade-based activities, health and wellbeing information sessions and other activities. Men's sheds contribute to their local communities in many ways, and I have seen wooden toys and furniture that they have donated to kinders and nursing homes. The sheds also enable men to reduce social isolation and improve their wellbeing.

Under this funding round, grants of up to \$60 000 are available for communities to build a new shed, redevelop an existing men's shed or co-locate a men's shed within a multifunction community facility or hub. Grants of up to \$30 000 are also available for refurbishment of existing men's sheds, including modifications to meet health, safety and disability and public access needs, increase shed capacity and expand activities based on community demand. Incorporated not-for-profit organisations and local councils are encouraged to apply, especially those from rural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and areas that are experiencing significant economic and social change.

The Andrews Labor government is a proud supporter of men's sheds across Victoria. We understand that men's sheds are not just buildings; they are enablers of stronger and more resilient communities. The former Bracks Labor government provided the first state government funding for building and refurbishing men's sheds back in 2006. This latest funding round will enable even more local communities right across Victoria to benefit from the safe, friendly and inclusive community spaces that men's sheds provide.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Members for Tarneit and Melton

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — What an extraordinary situation: the Victorian community with Neil Mitchell and 3AW is petitioning the Parliament and Premier Daniel Andrews to sack his two roting Labor members. The petition has been underway for less than 1 hour and there are already 2500 signatures. This is a phenomenal response. I want to read the petition, which states:

The petition of the taxpayers of Victoria draws to the attention of the house that we believe the Victorian Parliament and its members should stand for decency, transparency and act always in the public interest.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria require the member for Melton, Don Nardella, to repay the amount claimed through his second residence allowance and be required to resign from Parliament at once.

Further, that the member for Tarneit, Telmo Languiller, having agreed to repay, should at this stage serve out his term but retire at the next election.

We urge the Premier and the Parliament to act in the interest of Victoria to defend decency and ensure through whatever means that the above action is taken.

This is a situation where Daniel Andrews went to the election in 2014 promising accountability, transparency and honesty in the Victorian Parliament and to restore trust in our parliamentarians. The two people he put in charge of upholding that promise, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, have been the ones caught out in Victoria's largest political rort, and the Victorian community and the Liberal-Nationals coalition will not stand for it.

Catherine Jenkins and Vicki Perrett

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Training and Skills) — I rise to draw attention to the contribution of two women working at a local level and making a significant difference to other women within very different communities. Catherine Jenkins of South Purrumbete is a western Victoria dairy farmer who is switched on to issues confronting the industry while at the same time mindful of the need to create positive images and messages and outlets for frustration. At the height of the milk price-cut challenges last year, Catherine and a friend set up a Facebook page encouraging people to share positive and encouraging dairy stories and images. Now she is a finalist in the 2017 Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation's Victorian Women's Rural Award based

on her plan to complete a feasibility study and develop an Australian dairy women's network.

Vicki Perrett on the Bellarine Peninsula has just been awarded the inaugural Monica Hayes Award for Women, which is specific to women of the northern Bellarine communities. Vicki is an activist and a leader in several spheres, most notably through her work with Geelong Sustainability and also in Portarlington where she leads women in learning new skills and introduces them to new areas of interest. She is a skilled initiator, advocate and lobbyist. Vicki believes that women and girls in our community and across the globe can only have lives that are safe, happy, empowered and fulfilling if there is a planet for them to live on, embodying the principle of enough for all, forever.

Catherine and Vicki both believe in the importance of putting in in their communities, and of hearing people's voices. I congratulate both and wish Catherine well in the awards this morning.

Australia21

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to congratulate the think tank Australia21 on their powerful report launched on Monday, *Can Australia Respond to Drugs More Effectively and Safely?*. Drug-related deaths, diseases, injuries, crimes and social costs continue to rise despite more than 80 000 arrests in Australia each year. Now four former police commissioners and assistant commissioners, two former heads of corrective services, a former Supreme Court judge and a former Director of Public Prosecutions have made history by putting their names to a report that says it is time for decriminalisation.

The report was launched by Jeff Kennett, a former Liberal Premier of Victoria, and Bob Carr, a former federal Labor foreign affairs minister and a former Premier of New South Wales. This report does something that has never been done before: it tables solutions backed by the very people who were enforcing drug laws until recently. It comes out of an unprecedented round table convened by Mick Palmer, who has served as commissioner of both the Australian Federal Police and the Northern Territory police.

The Australia21 report makes 13 key recommendations. Chief amongst those is its call for an approach that distinguishes between high-end production and trafficking on the one hand and personal use and possession on the other. It does not recommend open slather legalisation of all drugs. Instead it supports incremental robustly evaluated steps towards a national policy of decriminalisation. I commend the contributors

for their important work and encourage MPs to read this groundbreaking work.

Multiculturalism

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Yesterday was Harmony Day, an important part of our great Australian migration story celebrated during Cultural Diversity Week, which runs from 18 to 26 March and occurs each year. As part of Cultural Diversity Week I attended the Premier's gala dinner, held at the convention centre last week and attended by 1400 key stakeholders, who enjoyed a night of outstanding multicultural entertainment around the theme 'Our journey, our stories'.

The courage and determination shown by Australians of all backgrounds in coming to a new land to build a new life is a critical part of a proud Australian history. However, this history is now being rewritten by the political activists hell-bent on changing our multicultural narrative, which has underpinned this policy success to make our state the greatest multicultural success story that has ever been written. So whilst the stories of the journey are a key feature of our cultural diversity, it is the destination and all that it stands for that provides the cohesion that has made Australia great. This symbolism is critical to the cohesive society we enjoy.

Regrettably the Premier's Gala Dinner made no mention of our destination — not a single mention of Australia — and the national anthem was not played. In fact the slogan 'Victorian. And Proud of It' has strategically replaced any reference to the word 'Australia'. Sadly it appears that our national identity is being sidelined, our national anthem is being silenced and our bipartisanship is beginning to fray and tatter as a result of the deliberate policies of the Andrews Labor government. With the Victorian Multicultural Commission all but gutted following the recent Labor restructure, we are seeing the results of this policy madness in a very short few months.

Duck season

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I was amazed to hear the Minister for Agriculture in question time yesterday describe the opening of the duck shooting season last weekend as 'orderly' and 'a relief to hunters'. Only someone who was not present at the wetlands could make such a statement. What I witnessed at First Marsh near Kerang on Saturday morning was nothing short of a relentless massacre of birds — and not just ducks. Hundreds of protected, rare

and threatened species were shot and left to die. It was shocking and sickening.

By Monday morning duck rescuers had recovered more than 800 dead waterbirds, largely from the marshes. It was the most they had recovered in the first weekend in 31 years. The majority of the birds were young, which not only represents the cruelty inflicted but also will impact on the breeding ability of those bird groups. The protected birds include 68 freckled ducks, 21 blue-billed ducks, 24 blue-winged shovelers, 34 Eurasian coots and 25 grebes. These are all protected and vulnerable species.

The minister also said 'certainly the overwhelming majority of duck hunters do the right thing'. Well, the evidence does not bear that out, with hundreds of protected species left to die at the marshes. She did not take the opportunity yesterday to condemn that.

Islamic Museum of Australia

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — On Sunday evening I had the great pleasure to represent Minister Robin Scott at the Islamic Museum of Australia's gala dinner. The Islamic Museum of Australia represents a fine institution in our multicultural museum landscape, and this week of celebrating harmony is another reason to celebrate the wonderful work that the Islamic museum does in terms of both outreach and education within the community. It was also my great pleasure at the time to announce that Minister Scott and the Victorian Multicultural Commission have provided a grant of \$450 000 over the next three years to the Islamic Museum of Australia to allow them to do further education and outreach, working against Islamophobia. It is very important that we protect our members of the community that are in a minority and that are being taken advantage of by despicable and horrendous politicians like Pauline Hanson, who want to do nothing more than be divisive and create dissension within our community when in fact we as a great multicultural state in Victoria look to be inclusive and embrace diversity to support our minorities and our ethnic communities to ensure that what makes us great is what brings us together and to celebrate one's differences and not be fearful of them.

It was my great honour to be the guest speaker at the Islamic museum dinner. I wish to commend the great work that they do in both education and outreach in the community.

Public transport

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I would like to talk today about public transport. I commend the efforts of my colleagues, Greens MPs and Greens councillors in Victoria, who were out last week talking to commuters about the troubles they are facing on our public transport system. I particularly want to relate the story of three commuters I talked to at Nunawading station. They certainly had a lot of time on their hands to talk to me, because they had been waiting 45 minutes for the 902 SmartBus. It was not that the SmartBus did not arrive; it was that two buses did arrive but they could not get onto those buses.

In terms of integrating with the public transport system, it is all very good and well to have buses, but if you cannot actually get on them, they do not really suit the purpose of what they are there to deliver in the SmartBus network. It was extraordinary to hear the stories of commuters out there who were waiting to interchange with the buses, and particularly about the GPS tracking on those buses. A bus on the GPS system will seemingly be 1 minute away from the bus stop and then all of a sudden completely disappear into thin air, as it was, from the digital system. I just want to sympathise with the frustrations of those commuters.

Melbourne Polytechnic Greensborough campus

Mr HERBERT (Northern Victoria) — Last Sunday saw Minister Tierney formally open Melbourne Polytechnic's Greensborough campus. The Greensborough campus is on the edge of the massive north-east growth corridor and, as such, commands a strategically vital location for education, training and skills for the region and for the new generation of young people growing up in that corridor. For newer members of this Parliament, it is important to know that the campus was one of the many closed under the previous coalition government's massive TAFE funding cuts, which stopped opportunities for local students to learn and also devastated the local community, as Mr Ondarchie very well knows. The loss of students devastated the Apollo Parkways shopping centre.

I congratulate the hardworking local Assembly member, Vicki Ward, who has fought tirelessly, not just to get this important TAFE campus reopened but to ensure that it genuinely meets the needs of the local community — a community who are absolutely delighted by the reopening. And why would they not be? It includes a \$10 million upgrade; a partnership with local schools, in many ways thanks to that great educator Howard Kelly, who fostered those

partnerships; new courses in pathology, aged care, business and horticulture; and the relocation of the Diamond Valley Learning Centre, enabling 20 vulnerable kids stuck on the waiting list to get an education. It has seen the establishment of the Melbourne Innovation Centre, which is helping new business in the area.

A new bus route has been opened by the government between Hurstbridge and Greensborough to let students visit the St Helena shops and attend the Greensborough campus, and of course design is well underway for a brand-new co-located state-of-the-art tech school as part of another government commitment to the area. This is a great initiative. The TAFE campus should never have been closed to the community. It has now reopened under the Andrews government, and it is servicing the community well.

Community safety

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak briefly on Victoria's crime wave, which the Andrews government seems utterly helpless to do anything about. We have recently seen new crime figures released that show a 10 per cent increase in crime over the last year, including highlights like aggravated burglary increasing by a staggering 40 per cent. The Minister for Police defended these results and described them as being quite good, considering that there was only a 0.1 per cent rise, she claimed, in some figures.

I want to talk about two horrific crimes in particular that I think epitomise the problem that we are seeing in our community. Cranbourne is the home invasion capital of Victoria. Last week a Cranbourne father was looking after his teenage daughter and her friends in their home when he was forced to fight off an armed gang who turned up with weapons, including a handgun and a rifle, and fired shots into his home. Even more horrific, a 22-year-old female tourist was last week raped outside St Vincent's Hospital in Fitzroy. She was accosted by a man on a tram and sought help. She got off the tram to try to flee him. She banged on a door at the hospital for assistance. It did not come fast enough and she was repeatedly raped. She was rescued by a security guard. Her assailant had been freed on bail a day before. This is a horrendous crime. It is very clear that what the Minister for Police says is true: Victorians do not feel safe in their own homes because they are not. Nor are they safe in everyday places like on trams in the middle of Melbourne. These crimes are appalling. The Minister for Police has no answer, and nor does the Premier.

Marc Leishman

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I rise today to congratulate one of Warrnambool’s best sportsmen, golfer Marc Leishman. On Monday Marc won the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Orlando with an amazing 20-metre putt, but what makes Marc such a hero in my region is that he is actually a nice guy. He regularly returns home to see family and old friends, and he is so highly respected in his community. Marc is an example that being a great sportsman does not mean that you have to be a brat like some of the young Australian tennis players whose behaviour is an insult to our sporting nation and a horrible role model for young tennis players coming through. Well done to Marc Leishman.

Chinese trade delegation

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — Last week I had the honour of welcoming members of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Gansu Provincial Committee to Parliament House. Attending their visit to Parliament House were representatives from the Victoria State Office of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria, councillors from Whitehorse, Banyule, Campaspe, Shepparton, Kingston, Manningham and Melbourne City councils, as well as representatives from businesses in Australia and China.

It was a great opportunity to learn about this region in China, which is home to over 23 million people, and of its capability in a variety of industries, including agriculture — wheat, maize, millet, cotton and linseed; livestock — beef, sheep, cattle and horses; natural resources and power; over 60 types of mineral, including copper, nickel, lead and zinc; and manufacturing. Gansu was a major producer of petroleum and has since branched out into other industries. We are given this opportunity to connect and grow together with this rich province that has so much to offer and to build a strong trade relationship. I would like to thank Michael Guo and the Australia International Trade Association for their hard work in helping facilitate this excellent networking opportunity.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

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

That this house requires the President to table the PricewaterhouseCoopers report to the Audit Committee in relation to the second residence allowance used by the members for Melton and Tarneit by Thursday, 23 March 2017.

President, yesterday in this place you advised the house that you had written to the Speaker regarding your receipt of, or the Parliament Audit Committee’s receipt of, a report from PricewaterhouseCoopers regarding the claims for second residence allowance by the members for Tarneit and Melton in the other place. In the course of that advice you went into some depth in indicating subject matter which is covered in that audit report and the basis of the claims that have been made by those two members of the other place with respect to their obtaining second residence allowances over various periods in relation to home bases which were not in their electorates — indeed home bases which had no connection at all with their electorates.

This is a matter which has been the subject of considerable public scrutiny over the last month — indeed considerable public concern over the last month — which ultimately led to the establishment of that inquiry by the Audit Committee and your commissioning, as the remaining Presiding Officer following the resignation of the member for Tarneit as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, of that Audit Committee inquiry into this matter.

Given that that audit report has now been received, as indicated in your advice to the Parliament yesterday, it is the view of the coalition that this audit report be put in the public domain at the earliest available opportunity. This is something which has generated considerable public debate and considerable public concern as to the conduct of the two members that are referred to in that report. It has led to the government indicating it will take action on this matter, though we have not seen that action to date. So it is appropriate that the audit report from PricewaterhouseCoopers be now put in the public domain. The purpose of the resolution that I am moving this morning is to ensure that that report can be released to the Parliament and subsequently to the public at the earliest available opportunity, and the nominal date of tomorrow has been set for the release.

This motion in many respects is similar to other documents motions which are put before this house requiring a responsible officer to present documents to the house for its consideration. In this instance it is slightly different insofar as it requires the President to present this report to this house. I say at the outset to the house that I have had several discussions with the President in respect of this matter, and the President has indicated clearly that he does not object to this report being released to the house and does not have any concerns as to the content of the report in regard to it being released to this house. I think that is an important threshold to be recognised — that the President, having

seen the report, does not object to it being made available to the house.

In moving this motion I note that it is a direction to the President. This has been framed in such a way, and it is not particularly common for this house to direct the President in relation to matters. It has happened on a couple of occasions, though, and the one that is most notable is in relation to this chamber's defence of its resolution of November 2015 requiring the Ombudsman to inquire into Labor's staffing reports. That matter ended up in the Supreme Court, where the Ombudsman sought a decision from the court as to whether she had jurisdiction to undertake that inquiry. This house resolved to direct the President to represent the house in the Supreme Court, and when that matter was appealed in the Court of Appeal this house passed a further resolution both directing the President to intervene in the Court of Appeal and empowering the President to intervene in any subsequent appeals, as is the case now in the High Court.

So a direction from the house to the President does provide the President with cover and authority to act on behalf of this house and makes it clear that the actions the President takes are on behalf of the house. That was appropriate in relation to the President representing the Council in the Supreme Court, in the Court of Appeal and now in the High Court. It is the coalition's view in moving this motion that it is appropriate also that this requirement of the President ensures and puts beyond doubt that the President in releasing the report, which is the coalition's desire, is acting in accordance with the requirements of the house. I will come back to that issue shortly.

Another point I would like to make and put on record in this place is the position the government has articulated in the other place. Yesterday not surprisingly the statement that was provided to the Speaker from the President in relation to this matter was the subject of debate and questions in the Assembly, and in the course of addressing those questions in the other place the Premier indicated:

When the full report, which I hope is released as soon as possible — whether it is in half an hour or tomorrow or Thursday, I hope it is released as soon as possible ...

So the Premier is on the record indicating in the other place that it is his desire that the report be released as soon as possible. Accordingly we would not expect the government to object to resolving this motion today and seeking to have this report made available to the house. To recap, through discussions with the President it is clear that the President does not object to the release of the report. The motion, as it is currently drafted, does

provide protection for the President in releasing the report, and the government, via the Premier, yesterday indicated it is seeking for the report to be released at the earliest opportunity.

Following notice being given of this motion yesterday, I had subsequent discussions with the President this morning around the form of this motion and the way in which it is constructed as a direction. In the course of those discussions, and considering the issue of a direction versus the capacity for the President to table the report of his own volition, the President has indicated that, on balance, considering those two competing aspects, it is his preference that he table the report rather than have it as a direct response to an order of the Council.

So having regard to the President's view and respecting the President's view, I indicate to the house that the coalition would agree to an adjournment of the debate on this motion on the basis of the discussions that the coalition had with the President when the house started this morning and that he is willing to table the report in accordance with the time frames that are set down in the motion that I have moved. And of course that mechanism will achieve the outcome, will achieve the objective that the coalition had in giving notice of this motion yesterday, which was to ensure that this report would be made available publicly at the earliest opportunity.

The discussion with the President and the President's willingness to table documents indicate that the coalition's objective will be achieved through this alternative mechanism. So if a motion were moved for this debate to be adjourned on the basis that the President has agreed to table the document, the coalition would not oppose that, because we do believe that this document should be made available to the house, with the protection of parliamentary privilege, at the earliest opportunity.

This is a matter which has caused great concern in the Victorian community. It has damaged the reputation, I think, of all members of Parliament in the Victorian community and has highlighted an area that is in need of reform. So for this report to be made available at the earliest opportunity will go a long way in clarifying what has occurred with these two members and hopefully also provide further guidance as to the way forward. So with those remarks, we indicate that we are happy to accept an undertaking from the President to table the report, and we look forward to that being provided at the earliest opportunity.

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

That the debate be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

In so moving, I take up the spirit in which Mr Rich-Phillips concluded his remarks in recognising the preparedness of the President, as the Presiding Officer in this place and as chair of the Audit Committee, to make a determination within his responsibilities to release this information to the Parliament and comply with the time frames that are envisaged within the motion.

Yesterday, President, when I denied leave when Ms Wooldridge sought a similar device, I took to my feet primarily to protect the interests of you in the chair and the institution in relation to your ability to comply with any direction of the chamber, and that is the spirit in which I seek to adjourn this matter today. I am very concerned about your prerogative and responsibility to acquit your obligations to the Parliament and the method by which the Audit Committee has evaluated these matters to make a determination in your own right but on this occasion with the invitation of the chamber to come back and table the document. I think that is a very important principle.

President, you and many members of this chamber know that, for all my years in this place, I do not really rely on standing orders that often. I do not really rely on them verbatim. I do not rely on convention. I colloquially refer to them, but I am always mindful of my obligations to act to protect the interests of the government. On many, many occasions my actions are misunderstood in the fact that I act in accordance with protecting the statute or protecting the procedures of this chamber and protecting the Chair. In fact my intervention today is in the spirit of protecting the interests of the Chair. I am most uncomfortable, and I think the Parliament should be most uncomfortable, with establishing a series of precedents where this chamber directs the Chair.

This may have been an appropriate direction to the Chair in accordance with what is a reasonable limit of the Chair's responsibilities, but there may be many instances when that is not the case. I think the institution of the Parliament should be ever mindful of the limits of what is appropriate to demand of the Presiding Officer. Certainly I would be concerned if this precedent would be taken in the future to mean that we as a chamber would be directing you, President, to take actions outside of your responsibilities without your ability to rely on your statutory obligations or the conventions of the Parliament to act in a certain way, or

you may be called upon to act in a punitive way beyond the scope of your powers. You may be asked to intervene in a whole range of matters beyond your direct responsibility. I think that is something we should be very mindful of as a chamber. We should be very cautious about the way in which we ask you to exercise your responsibilities. We should be respectful of your independence within the parliamentary institution. That is the spirit in which I make my contribution today.

The government fully understands, accepts and welcomes the tabling of this document in a time frame consistent with the original motion moved by Mr Rich-Phillips. I think it would be more appropriate for the Parliament to furnish you with the opportunity to give those undertakings to the Parliament of your own volition and to table the document in accordance with the form that you think it should be in as acquitting your obligations not only as a Presiding Officer but also as chair of the Audit Committee. The government believes you should be afforded that opportunity, and that is the reason why I am seeking to adjourn this matter today.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — Speaking briefly on some aspects of the motion but of course on the proposal to adjourn the motion, I am confident that the letter you provided us yesterday, President, gives us all the highlights — or perhaps we might call them low lights — of the findings of the investigation. I am equally confident that at the time you initiated the Audit Committee inquiry you would have understood that there was going to be a high level of public interest and demand for this report when it was provided, so I do not think it is any great surprise to anyone in the chamber that we are seeking exposure of the results of the audit itself.

I think it is notable that this process — the Audit Committee, its investigation and its move to findings — was done in a relatively quick time frame and, from what I have so far learned, was actually quite comprehensive. What that has meant is that the matters that have been subject to great public interest have actually been able to be brought to a finding in a fairly short period. There are other allegations about the misuse of entitlements that have been rattling around inside this Parliament for a period of years now that we have no resolution on. I think so far this process has been a credit to the ability of you, your assistants and the parliamentary Audit Committee to shed more light onto the matter that we have all been discussing.

I am certainly happy to support the way that we are going here in terms of adjourning the matter rather than,

since it appears to be unnecessary to do so, establishing another precedent about the house and where it may direct the President to act in a certain way. What should happen to this report once it is tabled is that it should be provided to the lower house Privileges Committee, which should be investigating the matter. When I say investigate, a factual investigation has been done quite comprehensively and completely from what I have been able to see. They would be considering whether a form of misconduct or misuse has in fact occurred and, if so, what is to be done about that. That is the reason why this report needs to be provided, but the two houses together — the Parliament as a whole and particularly the Legislative Assembly, where these two members reside — have yet to resolve themselves around what they are going to do with this report.

In conclusion, yes, the report needs to be made public. I think we have come upon a good way of doing that. But the important question now for members to consider is: who is going to consider the report and what action will they take with the information that is contained in it?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I wish to make a short comment in respect of the motion that has been put and more importantly the adjournment motion that has been proposed by the Leader of the Government. What I wish to say in the following statement to the house in relation to the production of documents motion moved by Mr Rich-Phillips and the procedural motion moved by the Leader of the Government is that, as President, I do have concerns about the potential precedent of this house ordering me to produce documents. If the house requires me to produce documents, I am obviously obliged to do so, but such precedent is of concern given the potential for a Presiding Officer to be ordered to produce a range of documents that are otherwise, in my view, properly confidential.

At the same time the Speaker and I appreciate the genuine public interest in the release of the Audit Committee material in this instance. While it is not the role of Parliament's internal Audit Committee to publicly report, events have clearly transpired that mean that the public interest in releasing this information outweighs the public interest in this Audit Committee report remaining confidential.

I indicate to the house that following consultation with the Speaker I will seek leave on Thursday morning, which is consistent with the motion, to table the Audit Committee report in this house. This will consequently make the report publicly available, including to members of the Legislative Assembly, in line with the intent of Mr Rich-Phillips's motion. It is my view that

this is the preferable course of action, rather than a resolution of the house directing me to produce the same report.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Debate adjourned until next day.

HEYFIELD TIMBER MILL

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise today to speak on this motion. I move:

That this house calls on Premier Daniel Andrews to respect the views of the 1000 people who met at Heyfield on Wednesday, 1 February 2017, and keep his word that he will fight for every job to ensure that —

- (1) the Heyfield mill will stay open and its 250 staff will keep their jobs;
- (2) the town of Heyfield and the surrounding areas, businesses and communities have a future;
- (3) the thousands of businesses that rely on Australian Sustainable Hardwoods (ASH) products will also have a future;
- (4) Australian-made, high-quality, hardwood timber products from Australian-grown, environmentally sustainable and commercially managed regrowth forests are not replaced by imported products; and
- (5) over 7000 indirect jobs and affected families in Victoria are saved from the flow-on effects of this disaster.

Let me start to paint a picture of the timber industry in Gippsland and Australian Sustainable Hardwoods. Local Victorian timber stores carbon and locks carbon away. It is a renewable resource and is wholly biodegradable, strong and durable. It has a low energy consumption by comparison with other building materials, and it has a low embodied energy.

ASH uses only 100 per cent pure regrowth, replanted timber, and 94 per cent of Victorian forests are locked up. They are only able to use 6 per cent for the timber industry, and this is on an 80-year rotation, so one-eighth of the timber is felled each year — that is, one-eighth of 6 per cent. In the area we are looking at, we have 6.7 million hectares of forest and national parks in Victoria, and they are protected and never can be harvested. We have 130 000 hectares of commercial regrowth Victorian ash timber forest, and it is managed by the government through its commercial arm, VicForests.

ASH uses approximately 450 hectares annually for its timber supply, and that 450 hectares, once removed, is replanted and regenerated. It is the largest processor and manufacturer of hardwood timber products in the

Southern Hemisphere, and it competes very successfully with imports. I will have more to say on imports during my contribution. It is a viable business, and I have to say I take great offence when people are twittering and Facebooking, making ridiculous statements to say that this company is not viable. It has grown under the Hermal Group; it is a very viable, productive and innovative company.

The green mill supervisor, Mr Anthony Wilkes, who I have met on a number of occasions, informs me that this company has also reinvested money back in. So rather than it just creaming it off the top, it has reinvested it back in. They have got a high-tech finger joiner, and it is the only one in Australia. They are using it to make interesting and innovative products.

The great thing about ASH at the moment is that it uses 150 000 cubic metres of hardwood sawlogs per annum, raises \$60 million in revenue with \$7 million in exports, creates \$40 million in import replacements and pays \$14 million in salaries to the local community. That is \$14 million to families in Gippsland, predominantly in Heyfield, and it is going. Any suggestion that the government is going to buy this company out is just ridiculous. It is just a ruse. It is a sandbag to pretend that what they are doing is in some way moral and legal when it is not.

The company returns \$23 million to the taxpayer via VicForests and creates 7000 to 10 000 downstream jobs. It also makes beautiful products. Victorian ash, often called Tasmanian oak, is one of the best species of hardwood in the world. It is used for window sashes and staircases and is hard wearing and durable. It is used in a wide range of products such as doors, shop fittings, floors and furniture. When I was up in Heyfield a few weeks ago meeting with the CEO, Vince Hurley, he showed me a lovely floor product that is an amalgam of a number of different timbers. It is lightweight, purpose built, durable and well used in our modern society. It is manufactured at the ASH timber mill in Heyfield. ASH employs people locally and trains them up. There are people in the company who started work on the shop floor and have moved into managerial positions. There are long-term people who have been employed there for many years.

Yesterday the ASH timber people, because of their great frustration, attended a rally on the steps of Parliament House. I got up very early and walked up from my apartment. I did a lap of the precinct and about 250-odd sawmill trucks and a variety of other trucks from Gippsland were here in protest. One of the gentlemen I spoke to works in Melbourne. He said that the products they produce in Melbourne are

outstanding. He was there to show his support for the mill workers because the downstream effects will be profound and will impact broadly on Victoria.

The other thing Mr Wilkes told me is that this company also has a social conscience. ASH provides gift vouchers for use locally at Christmas time. It also provides company incentives to encourage a safe working environment. In terms of rewards, they provide local gift vouchers that can be used in the town, reinvesting that money in the town. Other users of ASH timber include Mawarra, a disability services provider which is reliant on timber from the ASH mill. Its enterprise, Jigsaw, uses the timber supplied by ASH to make hardwood doorjambes, screens and swatches. It has also been using a docking timber which can be returned to ASH and made into benchtops. Jigsaw's main employees happen to be people with disabilities, so they will be greatly affected. I was contacted by them to raise this matter in Parliament. It is not just about local jobs, it is about jobs downstream as well. With respect to Mawarra, all the transport costs are borne by ASH, so they do have a social conscience.

What I feel is really missing in relation to this issue is political leadership. Daniel Andrews and his Labor government need to continue the supply of timber at the required minimum level of 130 000 cubic metres, and save those 260 jobs. Yesterday, as I said, we saw timber workers out there on the steps and we saw the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). It was a CFMEU-led rally. It is shameful that in fact no Labor members were out there — Daniel Andrews was not on the steps to meet them. This is his core group of people, and they are furious at what he is doing. It was palpable. They are furious.

Ms Shing — Are you a member of the union now? Are you a member of the union, Ms Bath?

Ms BATH — It is a member for Eastern Victoria Region coming awake. That is good to hear.

The other thing about the workers I have met, and I have met a number of them, is that these people are practical self-starters. They do not want handouts; they want to be able to work. They want to be engaged in full employment — 260 people need to be engaged in full employment, not some reduced up-in-the-air thought bubble figure from the Labor government.

When I was speaking with Anthony Wilkes the other day he said that the Premier came to Hazelwood to talk about Hazelwood and the Latrobe Valley. Mr Wilkes came to Morwell and spoke to the Premier. Why? Because the Premier had refused to acknowledge

Mr Wilkes although he had made contact many times. Mr Wilkes came up to the Premier and looked him in the eye and said, 'Will you come to Heyfield?'. The Premier looked him in the eye and shook his hand and said, 'Yes, I will be there in four weeks'. The four weeks happen to be up this Friday, so I am expecting a call from Anthony Wilkes on Friday to say that Mr Andrews has come to Heyfield and will be explaining why he is enabling this mill to go under.

Ms Shing — Except that we have said we will buy it.

Ms BATH — I will get to that point, member for Eastern Victoria Region. Daniel Andrews needs to sit up and take notice. Gippslanders will not go quietly. He courts the Greens in marginal seats. Let us be truthful. That is what this agenda is about. The Andrews government must immediately expedite the possum exclusion zone review, and this is the key thing that the government falls over on. They should have created this review and put it into play over seven or eight months ago. Gippslanders are fully aware that this Premier is putting possums and Greens votes before people.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

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

Mr Finn interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Mr Finn, I am on my feet. I ask the chamber to come to order and let Ms Bath continue her contribution without interruption. I can tolerate a bit of interruption and interjection, but I think we need to keep that to a minimum.

Ms BATH — Last Friday afternoon I attended the meeting at ASH, in the process room. Both shifts were there — about 250 people altogether. The leaders of the Hermal Group, the owners, were there, as was the mill CEO, the union and the Committee for Gippsland, and they were unified in their voice. They were unified in their commitment that they will not lie down and let the mill go under — that they will fight for all 260 jobs. There was anger in the room, but there was also shock and grieving. I did not see this because at one point I felt it was time for me to leave, but Mr Wilkes said to me that he cried when he was speaking to people and that grown men were crying. This is not fair. These are people's lives, and this does not need to happen. It is not like the sky is falling in. There needs to be a process, and there is a way forward.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr Ramsay — On a point of order, Acting President, you made a ruling in relation to interjections, particularly by Mr Dalidakis, who has been a common and constant interjector. I ask either that he leave the chamber if he cannot be quiet or that you ask him to not interject further and to allow Ms Bath to finish her contribution in silence.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Thank you, Mr Ramsay, for your point of order. I was going to ask Mr Dalidakis to keep his interjections to an absolute minimum. I see that Mr Dalidakis is next on the speakers list, so he can make his contribution then. Ms Bath may continue her contribution. I remind members on the other side that interjection is happening on both sides.

Mr Finn interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Mr Finn, I cannot stop members of the government from interjecting if members of the opposition do not do the same, so I ask all members to keep their interjections to a minimal level.

Ms BATH — In that room last Friday people were incredibly furious. They were passionate, committed and totally on song about keeping this mill open and running at a capacity state. What they were also furious about — and it was palpable — was that the Andrews Labor government did not honour an agreement to allow the mill staff and the CEO to comment at 2 o'clock. When did the workers hear about it? They heard about it on ABC radio early in the morning. People were ringing my office and the radio station asking why was this the case. It was because the Premier does not care. He would rather score some political point than honour an arrangement to allow the company to speak to those people at 2 o'clock and let them be the first to hear. I think that says a lot.

There has been much said about contracts entered into by previous governments. I am sure we going to hear some flimsy arguments about this. What those who make these arguments will neglect to mention is that there has never been a sticking point on quantity. There has never been an issue around quantity. It is clear that back in 2014 VicForests allocated 155 cubic metres for a 10-plus-year contract. The timber is there. What we also know is that in 2014 ASH and VicForests made a long-term supply agreement to supply 155 000 cubic metres. The agreement was reached and it was signed. When Labor came into government the contract was sitting on the top of Tim Pallas's in-tray. There is no reason why he could not have taken it and signed off on it. I am not even going to entertain the rubbish that we

are going to hear in a minute, because it is not accurate. The timber is there and it was available for a long-term contract.

On the table now from VicForests, which came through in January, is an offer of 80 000 cubic metres of timber for the next financial year, 60 000 cubic metres for the year after and 60 000 cubic metres for the year after that. Only a three-year contract is on the table. In terms of production and an ongoing timber industry it is very difficult — in fact it is impossible — to retain local and international markets with a three-year contract and to create positive supply lines with that amount of timber.

The mill requires a minimum of 130 000 cubic metres per annum under current tooling. There is an issue around critical mass. I spoke to the mill CEO last week and drilled down into this some more. With anything over about 130 000 cubic metres of timber the mill can employ around 250 people, but when the amount of timber drops below that it tends to reach a critical level beyond which employing people can no longer be sustained. The ratio is one person per 1000 cubic metres. This preposterous idea of selling the timber mill to the government will not happen. But even if it were to happen, at 60 000 cubic metres a year the maximum number of employees would only be 65 to 70 people. So the argument that they can retain 260 people is null and void. That has come out of the mouth of the CEO — I am not creating this fact.

The other issue I have learned about in recent times is that if this contract does not go through, the green mill will go in September 2017. The green mill, the log yard and the timber stacker employers will have to go, and that is 42 jobs gone in September this year. Next in line will be the 25-millimetre line, and that is 13 jobs. In September 2018 the dry mill, the drying kilns and the boiler will close and 80 jobs will be gone. The administration employees will go along the way. In December 2018 the rest of the employees will go, and that will be a very sad and tragic day if it comes to pass.

Eight weeks ago the government released a statement saying that it would negotiate in good faith and asked for an extension so that they could negotiate with ASH's owners. It was really a false hope in my opinion. Come 14 March ASH was provided with a proposal for the same supply that it was offered in January of 80 000 and 60 000 cubic metres. The timber industry, as I said, cannot operate on three-year cycles. It was also offered \$4.75 million over three years, effectively as an operational subsidy. The government said it would provide \$250 000 for retooling. In that respect it is just ridiculous. The losses that would be felt by the business each year under this scenario would be over \$12 million

with government operational assistance of just \$1.5 million. After the subsidy is factored in we would still see a \$10 million loss.

Let us compare this with Alcoa. I am pleased for Alcoa and I am pleased for the people of western Victoria that they are retaining their jobs. Jobs in regional Victoria are so important to retain the fabric of that society and to keep it going, because regional Victoria keeps the city growing on multiple levels. The government spent over \$200 million to retain those jobs and keep Alcoa going, so this figure of under \$5 million is a paltry sum by comparison. Why has the government done this? Because it does not suit its ideology. Its ideology is to introduce the great forest national park by stealth and damn the timber mill to history.

Let us have a look at the Leadbeater's possum. The Leadbeater's possum is our floral emblem — —

Ms Dunn — No, it is our faunal emblem.

Ms BATH — It is our faunal emblem, correct. I am sure that everybody standing in this room — —

Mr Dalidakis — We are actually sitting.

Ms BATH — I am standing. I am sure that everyone present in this room wants to see our faunal emblem flourish, thrive and live for eternity. The environment and agriculture ministers in the former coalition government established a Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group. In January 2014 a report was published, and it included the following recommendations: provide protection to Leadbeater's possum colonies, protect current high-quality habitat, protect existing old-growth forest and expand future growth forest, enhance the extent and quality of the Leadbeater's possum habitat for the future and proactively provide additional nesting sources.

So a 200-metre radius exclusion zone was established — a special protection zone. Once a colony of Leadbeater's possum — and a colony can consist of one — is sighted, the requirement is to put a 200-metre exclusion zone around that area. This equates to 12 hectares. It has also been said that in actual fact the Leadbeater's possum's home range is about 1 to 3 hectares. I guess 12 hectares was an over-exaggeration, but that was the indication at the time.

The January 2014 report also recommended that an interim review of the establishment of the 200-metre radius timber harvest exclusion zone around colonies occur once a trigger of 200 new colonies had been located. So there was a trigger that once 200 sightings

existed there needed to be a review. When did that occur? It occurred back in June 2016, and here is the rub. Why did the Labor government sit on its hands for eight months and not conduct this review? This review needs to be a scientific investigation of the Leadbeater's possum colonies, and it needs to be thorough and comprehensive.

I am pretty sure that Leadbeater's possums do not actually know which are timber coupes and which are native forests that are locked up. I do not think they go through and check out a force field. Leadbeater's possums will nest and live wherever there is good habitat, whether it is in potential logging coupes or whether it is in part of the 94 per cent of all locked-up forest. To date we know that there are a bit over 560 Leadbeater's possum colonies that are protected in Victoria. We also know that pre-2014, 124 colonies were identified, and since 2014, 361 have been identified in state forests where logging can occur. We further know that in national parks there are only 84 colonies.

My feeling on this one is that you find things where you look for them. In any situation there needs to be a true and scientific record of where Leadbeater's possum colonies exist. When non-government organisations survey they tend to go into logging coupe areas and look for them there, so has there been a biased survey? Has there been a biased technique in that science? Mr Ross Hampton from the Australian Forests Products Association only yesterday was on Jon Faine's show indicating that there is quite likely 30 000 to 40 000 possums in Victoria — not an endangered species in this state. The issue is the government should have instigated the 200-metre review eight months ago.

The people of East Gippsland are desperate to keep this mill at working capacity. ASH has commented back to the government — I guess an olive branch offered with a proposal. The proposal was to take that 80 000 cubic metres that would have been delivered in the next year — if they took up the option — and provide it within the next seven months. Once they have done that, within that period of time all 260 employees could retain their full-time jobs. No-one would have to be laid off, as I indicated earlier. That makes so much sense. This government should make sure it gets round to doing and completing the review, which it should have initiated and done back in 2016 — 1 July, when that trigger came off.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Ms BATH — The Minister for Agriculture just a few weeks ago in this house stated the following:

We understand absolutely the importance of these jobs to the Heyfield community and to the families that are affected, and we will do everything within our power to ensure that this business is on a more secure footing than it is now. It needs to have a viable business model, and we are working around the clock on these matters.

This government has failed on all fronts on that point. Also the Andrews government has a food and fibre sector strategy. It is a plan for the sector, and it contains as a key goal work towards providing greater resource access certainty for foresters and fishers. I quote:

We are committed to securing sustainable access to fisheries and forestry resources. We will work towards providing greater resource access certainty to help underpin new markets, support high-value manufacturing, and encourage investment.

How are they doing that by shutting out this mill and threatening the livelihood of the timber worker?

Mr Dalidakis has been constantly interjecting this morning, and I feel that is an indication of the level of his frustration. I know that Mr Dalidakis has been a strong advocate for the timber industry in the past in his role as CEO of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries. Mr Dalidakis gave evidence to a Senate inquiry in 2010. On threats to the forest he said:

Let us be very clear about that as well: the greatest threat to threatened species and flora and fauna within national parks, state forests or private landholdings is in fact the threat of wildfire. We are not talking about something that other people would construe as rocket science ... the impacts across the land base are greater as a result of wildfire than anything that our industry does.

That brings us to a point in terms of fire protection. The roads and pathways that the forest industry keeps open are an important avenue for fire protection. The equipment and trucks enable those to remain open, and they form a very important part of that fire protection network. Mr Dalidakis also commented on good forests policy versus political expediency:

... at the end of the day good public policy sometimes gets thrown out the window for political expediency. When that occurs, that might mean that marginal jurisdictions or jurisdictions where there is no political support from one political party or the other see their futures married up against the futures of inner-city electorates where the votes become more critical at election time. Unfortunately, that good public policy again sometimes gives way to political expediency.

The other thing that I would point out is that the greatest threat to the flora and fauna and the threatened species in particular that reside within national parks is in fact now the threat of catastrophic wildfire.

Mr Dalidakis also went on the record as saying on public support for forests industries:

What this poll shows —

this was a poll conducted across people —

is that the vast majority of Victorian voters understand that timber is a renewable, environmentally friendly product, and that as a community we should supply our own needs rather than import wood and paper product from overseas ...

What we are going to see in the future is a shutting down of our timber market. What we are going to see is imports on the increase. What we are going to see is that we are going to have imports from rainforests across the seas, potentially from Malaysia or Indonesia, where there are no rigorous protocols put in place. Whilst we can pat ourselves on the back and the government might fight off the inner-city Greens votes if they are lucky, somewhere overseas we will see the death and destruction of a different species.

In conclusion, the people of Gippsland deserve better. This community of Victoria deserves better. We have 260 people who are going to lose their jobs; we have 7000 jobs downstream that will be affected. This government is happy to roll over and let that happen. It is due to a lack of leadership on the part of Daniel Andrews and this government.

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I really appreciate the opportunity to actually speak — not be quoted — before this house and for evermore through *Hansard*. Let me make some quick comments in relation to the somewhat deficient contribution by Ms Bath. First and foremost, I absolutely stand by the comments that she quoted me making — 100 per cent. The biggest threat to biodiversity and to flora and fauna in our parks is in fact the threat of wildfire. The reason the timber industry is at this point suffering in relation to its sustainable yield calculations is a direct result of the very tragic consequences of the Black Saturday fires — tragic not because of the loss of timber but because people lost their lives, including people from the industry.

I want to remind people in this place that I was the chief executive of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries when the Black Saturday fires occurred in 2009. It was extraordinarily challenging — emotionally challenging — for me to represent the industry at that point in time, when whole communities were devastated as a result of the wildfire and as a result of the outcomes of the fires, some of which still scar people today and will scar them beyond today. The outcomes were the loss of people's family members,

friends and homes, as well as the loss of industries, businesses and whole communities. This is something that we should never make light of.

The threat of wildfire to people, to biodiversity and to flora and fauna is significant. We in Australia suffer a threat of bushfires that is probably second only to the California bushfires and some of the fires in South America. That probably places us in the top two or three areas in the world that suffer from catastrophic bushfires. I note that shortly after I returned from my cybersecurity trade mission to Israel in November last year Israel suffered some tragic bushfires.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Fortunately my brothers and sisters from Greece managed to assist Israel in putting those fires out. Mr Ondarchie should be very careful about interjecting when I am talking about the loss of people's lives, families and habitats. Let me put it on the record forevermore that Mr Ondarchie wishes to make light of people losing their lives, their houses and their businesses. This is the depth of the depravity of those opposite in their politics — the politics of partisanship. Here we go; this will be good.

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, Acting President, as Mr Dalidakis looks to make light of his own contributions he is verballing me in the Parliament. It is inappropriate for those imputations to be made against me.

Ms Shing — Further to the point of order, Acting President, the interjection that Mr Ondarchie made immediately prior to Mr Dalidakis talking about the seriousness of the issues around loss of life was in fact Mr Ondarchie provoking Mr Dalidakis by discussing details of the trip that Mr Dalidakis had referred to. On that basis Mr Dalidakis is entitled to take up your catcalls and interjections in order to get back to the topic at hand.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! I remind members that I am actually on my feet. Thank you, Mr Ondarchie, for the point of order. What I would like to say on this is that it is a very emotional issue, and I think since we started the debate on this matter there have been interjections from both sides. While this is a very sensitive issue, we need to be a bit respectful about members making their contributions. I ask Mr Dalidakis to go back to the issue and debate the motion.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, Acting President. I was actually being quite germane to the issue. I was talking about the issue and the impact of forest fires on biodiversity and how in fact our natural landscape is one of the most susceptible to wildfires. I was referring to my trip to Israel late last year. They suffered tragic bushfires in the north of Israel, and I was very proud that my Hellenic brothers and sisters assisted them to put the fires out.

The point that I was making is that the quotes that Ms Bath attributed to me were ones that I continue to stand by. There is no greater threat to the timber industry than the threat that catastrophic wildfire poses. This is demonstrated by exactly the point that we are at today where the sustainable yield across the industry has been impacted by the reduction in timber available to harvest as a direct result of those catastrophic wildfires of Black Saturday. That is an inescapable truth. It is a difficult one for everybody who loves the timber industry, like me, to deal with, but unfortunately it is the truth nonetheless.

Ms Bath made a feeble attempt to assign blame for the current situation that we are in purely to the actions — or inactions, as she tried to claim — of the current Labor government. The fact remains that we are in this situation not just because of the catastrophic wildfires but because of the prescriptions put in place by the member for Warrandyte in the other place, the Honourable Ryan Smith — not so honourable given his actions and what they have led to today. Not once did Ms Bath attempt to explain the actions of Mr Smith.

I note that we have Mr O'Sullivan in the chamber as well. It is worth pointing that out because Mr O'Sullivan in the former government was the chief of staff to Peter Walsh in the Legislative Assembly. Can I just say on the record that I know Peter reasonably well and I quite like him. I think Peter did the best that he could in the previous government, but the fact remains that the agreement between VicForests and Australian Sustainable Hardwoods (ASH) took a very long time to be agreed to. I am not apportioning blame, believe it or not, to Mr Walsh. ASH has proven to be quite robust in discussions that it has had, no doubt with this government but with the prior government as well.

As a result of the very lengthy time taken in reaching a final agreement, as I understand it, what then happened was the contract needed to go to the then Treasurer, Michael O'Brien, the member for Malvern in the other place, who did nothing. In fact we should actually nickname him the Aero bar man, because it was the bubbles of nothing that made it really something. He

did absolutely nothing. We have seen those three monkeys — see no evil, hear no evil, do no evil — well; it was a bit like Mr O'Brien. He was very quick to sign the contract for the east–west link and not so quick to sign the contract for ASH. The contract sat on Mr O'Brien's desk for months and months and months. It sat there for a very long time. The contract sat on his desk so long that it almost grew mould on it; that is how long it was sitting on his desk.

The reason that these facts are inconvenient facts to those opposite is that we would not be in the position we are today if they had executed a contract that required a supply of timber. But when we came to government in November 2014, when I was elected to this place, the best advice we had at that point in time was that the contract could not be executed under the arrangements put in place by the negotiations Mr Walsh had, and no doubt Mr O'Sullivan had these negotiations as a chief of staff to Mr Walsh as well. No doubt Mr O'Sullivan will be able to elucidate on the discussions that he directly had with ASH and the department at the time. On the best advice that we have got, as a result of the current review and prescriptions in relation to timber harvesting, we are limited to harvesting a volume that ensures that there are other mills in Victoria that can continue to survive and have their contracts honoured as well.

This does not seem to be brought up by those opposite, and I do love the fact that for the first time in a long time we now have a unity ticket between the opposition, the Liberals, The Nationals and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), a union that we are always proud to associate ourselves with on the Labor side of life. I do love the fact that the members opposite — the Liberal members and the National members opposite — are now trying to hug a CFMEU member. They are now trying to hug the CFMEU; they want to bring the CFMEU into the bosom of their inner circle. In fact I think that they have got a call out to Michael O'Connor right now asking him to come to their party room and talk to them about what they can do to support Michael and the union more, because of course they have always been strong supporters of the union movement over there! So much so that of course we have got the Prime Minister coming out and attacking people on penalty rates, and by the way that would likely include workers at ASH that get penalty rates as well.

But that is okay; that is a completely inescapable and inconvenient truth for those opposite. That is okay because sometimes the truth hurts for those opposite. And that is why we on this side of the chamber are here

to remind them of their very negative point and place in this sore and sordid history.

I value the fact that I have got 48 minutes and 45 seconds to go, because I am going to use every single second of that time available. We have so much to talk about. Let us deal right now with the prescriptions put in place by Ryan Smith, the member for Warrandyte in the other place, when he was the minister for environment. What did he do? He said, 'Every time a little possum turns up we are going to put a 12-hectare radius around it as a protection zone'. That is what he did.

For those people that may be listening to Parliament through the World Wide Web — the same World Wide Web that Malcolm Turnbull apparently created; the very one and the same — and for those people that are watching Parliament, although I do acknowledge that question time is on in the other place and maybe some people are more interested in question time there, they would not have heard Ms Bath in her opening speech, in her gambit, in her very deficient protection and defence of those opposite, mention Mr Ryan Smith once.

The reason that they would not have heard Ms Bath mention Ryan Smith is that they are all pretty embarrassed by him. They are embarrassed by him, and they have got good right and good reason to be. You will not hear Mr O'Sullivan get up and defend him. You will not hear Mr Ramsay from the country defend him. You will not hear Mr Ramsay take a point of order and say, 'You have said something mean and nasty about Mr Ryan Smith'. Why? Because it is true, and truth is actually a defence in this place. They cannot stand up and defend Mr Ryan Smith or the work that he undertook, because they know that everything that is occurring at the moment in the industry at large can also be traced back to him.

So we have the issue that I have already spoken about — the impact of catastrophic wildfires. The second issue that we are dealing with is the prescriptions that Mr Ryan Smith put in place around the Leadbeater's possum.

Now, this is unfortunate, I know, and those opposite can scream and yell all they like, but *Hansard* will always show for time immemorial that Ryan Smith is the man who put his hands around the neck of the timber industry and constricted it and constrained it and reduced it.

Let us talk about contracts for a moment, because those opposite want a contract to be signed with ASH and

then for contracts with other timber mills around Victoria to be ignored. That is what they actually want, because right now the sustainable yield dictates that any timber provided beyond what has been offered at this point in time will mean that other mills will suffer. That sustainable yield, that produce and that resource will have to be taken away from other mills to give to ASH. What those opposite are trying to do is say to the timber mill in Powelltown, to Graeme Brown's timber mill in Noojee and to Ryan & McNulty in Benalla, which is a great business — Ryan & McNulty is a fantastic local business in Benalla, and Greg McNulty does a lot for the local community — 'You guys are worthless to us. You are nothing to us. We should give you nothing. We're going to give it all to ASH'. That is exactly what they have just done, because the resource unfortunately is not there. The resource unfortunately is not open and available to the industry at this point in time. It does not matter how you cut up a pie, you only get so many pieces from it.

Those opposite are actually trying to say to Ryan & McNulty, they are trying to say to Graeme Brown and they are trying to say to Powelltown, 'We don't care about you'. That is what they are trying to say. You cannot give a resource to one customer only from one supplier and take the resource away from everybody else. That is not how it works.

Ms Bath would like to try and have you believe that somehow she bleeds for the timber industry. Well, do you know what? There has been no bleeding for the timber industry, because when they had a chance in government to try and do something about Ryan Smith they squibbed it. They did nothing. They decided to retreat, because the country cousins of the city Liberals did nothing. Once again they have proven to be completely impotent and ineffective with their larger coalition partner. That is it; that is the truth of the matter. The truth of the matter is that country Victorians can never rely on The Nationals to deliver anything. That is why the Liberals try so hard to unseat them when the opportunity to have a three-cornered contest comes up. They try and work hard — why? Because the socialist agrarians of the Parliament — those people that are far more socialistic in their endeavours than anybody would like anyone to be in a democracy like Australia — are trying their very hardest now to shovel all of the resource into ASH, and it does not matter which other customers have contracts with VicForests or the government. It does not matter what contracts exist. It does not matter how many people are affected. It does not matter about the families in Yarra Junction or the families in Powelltown or the families in Noojee or the families in the local community of Benalla. None of those families matter to those opposite. They want to

rip the resource right out of all of those sawmills and put it into ASH. That is what they want to do, but even then that amount of resource still will not give the adequate supply that they want, because unfortunately if the supply is not there on the current indications then there is nothing we can do about it.

Now, let us deal with this. As I have indicated in this place, Mr Walsh in the other place is somebody I have known for a long time, and I do enjoy his company. He and I have known each other for a long time. Outside of this place I would even happily buy and share a beer with Mr O'Sullivan, because I know that deep down he loves the timber industry as well. But unfortunately the circumstances and the truth dictate this situation, which is that The Nationals only have themselves to blame, because they rolled over when Ryan Smith put his prescriptions forward.

Mr O'Sullivan interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr O'Sullivan takes issue with my commentary about them rolling over, and no doubt Mr O'Sullivan, with the integrity and the strength of character he has, will in his contribution directly deal with the fact that when Ryan Smith put his prescriptions to cabinet, The Nationals rolled over and did not so much as yelp. They did not say to the leader at the time, 'If you move forward with this public policy, we will leave the coalition'. They did not say that. They did not defend the industry. They said, 'Oh, okay. We're only one or two in this cabinet. If that's what the Liberals want to do, then we'll roll over and allow them to do it'. So they put these prescriptions in place.

I look forward to listening to Mr O'Sullivan's speech, because no doubt Mr O'Sullivan will want *Hansard* to reflect exactly what happened. While Mr O'Sullivan would not have been in the cabinet room, his boss at the time, Mr Walsh, was. Between now and him making his contribution he has plenty of time to ask Mr Walsh exactly what happened in the cabinet room. He has plenty of time to correct the record. He could stand up on a point of order and say, 'That's factually incorrect', but he cannot. He cannot stand up and say, 'I make a point of order', because it is true: Ryan Smith and the Liberals rolled The Nationals.

The very fact of the matter is that the Liberal Party is far closer to the Greens, which is why we see the Libs and the Greens do such dirty deals in this Parliament all the time, especially when they kicked out Gavin Jennings for six months. That is why we have seen them repeatedly get together to try and frustrate and block legislation the government tries to put through

this Parliament. The Liberals and the Greens are actually merging into one as we speak. The colour of one party and the colour of the other seems to be merging to become a murky, dirty green-brown colour. But the Nats will come into this chamber and stand strong. They will stand strong for country Victoria, and they will stand strong for the timber industry because as you, Acting President Dunn, know, when it comes to the timber industry there is no-one better at saying 'We support you' and then rolling over when their action actually counts. There is no-one better.

So what did we see? There was no mention in 2015 of the federal Liberal Minister for the Environment, Greg Hunt, who also prescribed the possum under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC act). No, that was not mentioned by Melina Bath either, because that is another inconvenient truth that The Nationals do not want to also highlight — that once again another Liberal in another Parliament rolled The Nationals. We had the cabinet in a state government of a coalition nature roll the Nats, and then federally we had the Liberals roll the Nats again.

So here we go — we have got two examples. If you do not want to believe me, because 'trust' and 'politicians' are two words that do not often get used together by the community, you do not need to trust me, you just need to go back and look at history. You just need to go back and see what actually happened: Ryan Smith in the Legislative Assembly, a Liberal member of a Liberal government, put through a prescription that killed the timber industry, and then a federal Liberal minister in a federal Liberal government rolled The Nationals in the federal coalition to prescribe the possum under the EPBC act, which was not required. It is my personal opinion that it was not required.

Of course Mr O'Sullivan probably agrees with me, and maybe he will come out and agree with me on that purpose as well and on that basis. The problem of course that we all have is that Ryan Smith is still a colleague of Mr O'Sullivan's on that side, so the two do this merry little weird dance, and of course the federal environment minister is still in the federal Parliament and is still a colleague of Mr O'Sullivan's Nationals friends in that Parliament — very inconvenient truths. Once again what we have seen is the National Party lose its soul. That is what it has done. The National Party has lost its mojo.

We then see Melina Bath come into this place and shed these crocodile tears — 'Woe is us. The timber industry is suffering'. Well, it is suffering because of people like you, Ms Bath. That is why it is suffering.

Ms Bath — On a point of order, Acting President, could you please give the house your feelings and your thoughts on the fact that Mr Dalidakis has used my name twice? Normally we go by our honorifics and then our surnames.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Thank you, Ms Bath. I remind members when they are making contributions in the house and referring to members that Ms Bath is quite correct that we do use honorifics and surnames.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, Acting President. Let us deal with the big issues. ‘No, we don’t want to take issue with the fact that the member is making a contribution that attacks us, that says that we rolled over for the Liberals. No, no, please don’t call me by my first and second names, just “Ms Bath”’. They are the big issues of the Parliament. I can see why you made that point of order, Ms Bath. I can see why you are embarrassed to be a member of a party that rolled over and allowed the Liberals to roll The Nationals — —

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, Acting President, and it goes to relevance, the member stands there and bullies Ms Bath and decides to take issue with her about his reflection of her in the chamber, so I ask you to bring him back to the motion at hand rather than bullying some woman in the chamber.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Further on the point of order, Acting President, if I may. Ms Bath quoted directly about me in her speech. I am well within my rights to make mention and take note of Ms Bath’s contribution in my response to this motion.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Mr Ondarchie! In relation to the point of order, I would just remind all members when they are making their contributions to stick to the issues and not personalise the debate. It is not a place for incitement.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, Acting President; I appreciate the guidance. Unfortunately for those opposite it cannot be incitement when I look at the record of the Liberal Party. Unfortunately the truth hurts. The truth is the truth is the truth. This is not some weird kind of Donald Trump fake news line; this is actually fact. The fact is that a Liberal minister in a Liberal government and then a federal Liberal minister in a federal coalition government got their policies through and rolled their National Party colleagues.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Mr Ramsay!

Ms Shing — On a point of order, Acting President, I was just wondering if perhaps the minister could stop talking for a moment so that Mr Ramsay can be properly heard!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! That is not a point of order, Ms Shing.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Mr Ramsay! Can I just remind members to keep their contributions to the motion that we are contemplating and let all members speak, as they have a right to do in this chamber, without hindrance.

Mr DALIDAKIS — That is a fine principle, and one that I adhere to regularly, Acting President. I appreciate your support. Again let us get back to the reason that we are in this situation. As I have said, catastrophic wildfire is a significant impact on the sustainable yield that we have, sadly, today. We also have the issue of prescriptions around possums, and I have spent some time labouring on that fact. Why? Because it is important to remind those opposite of the role that the Liberals played in getting to the position we are in today.

Mr O’Sullivan interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Unfortunately Mr O’Sullivan is interjecting, and I will not take up the interjection because I know he will have his own contribution to make. But again, why do we not put in *Hansard* that Mr O’Sullivan will commit himself to telling this chamber exactly what the role of The Nationals was in trying to stop the prescription by Ryan Smith, what the role of The Nationals was in trying to stop the addition of the Leadbeater’s possum to the EPBC act — —

Mr O’Sullivan — On a point of order, Acting President, it appears that the minister has run out of material to speak from, and he has still got 32 minutes in which he is going to try and just reflect on the views of people on this side of the chamber in terms of what they might say in the future. I think it would be handy for him to come back to the subject matter, but I think he has actually run out of material and might want to sit down and go and have lunch.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Thank you, Mr O’Sullivan. That is not a point of order. Mr Dalidakis is the lead speaker for the government and therefore can make a far-ranging contribution.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, Acting President. I think Mr O’Sullivan is upset that he is the Deputy Leader of The Nationals today. Maybe he will be the leader tomorrow. I think again we need to remind this chamber that we look forward to the contribution that Mr O’Sullivan will make when it is his turn. We look forward to the contribution and to him setting the record straight — setting the record straight very specifically in relation to this motion and the role that his old boss, Mr Walsh in the Legislative Assembly, had in trying to —

Mr O’Sullivan — He’s still the boss.

Mr DALIDAKIS — And still the boss, yes. That is a very good point, Mr O’Sullivan. We look forward to Mr O’Sullivan elucidating what happened at the time those prescriptions were made, because we should all be enlightened by the tough and gruff nature of the argy-bargy between The Nationals and the Liberals that saw The Nationals steamrolled by Ryan Smith and the Liberals in the last government.

Maybe Mr O’Sullivan can text message Senator McKenzie, who is obviously a fine, upstanding Nationals senator representing Victoria in Canberra. I think Senator McKenzie might also have some views about what the federal Liberal government did in prescribing the Leadbeater’s possum under the EPBC act. Of course I will leave that to Mr O’Sullivan to contribute as Ms Bath cannot contribute any further to this debate because she spoke to the motion at its inception. But I look forward to Mr O’Sullivan setting the record straight. It is an important opportunity that he has to prove to the people of rural and regional Victoria that The Nationals did not get steamrolled, that The Nationals did stand up for timber workers right across country Victoria, because otherwise these words are hollow.

I did acknowledge the difficulty in dealing with Australian Sustainable Hardwoods in robust negotiations and discussions with this government and the last. I note that Ms Bath in her contribution wanted to refer back to comments that Australian Sustainable Hardwoods has made about the government. Well, Acting President Dunn, you will like this. You should listen to this, Acting President, I know you will be delighted by it. In an interview last Friday morning on ABC Gippsland the chief executive of Australian Sustainable Hardwoods said this, and let me just read exactly what the chief executive said about Mr Walsh, and I quote:

Peter Walsh allowed a contract to be signed with us and then did not sign the indemnity at the close of government, despite promises, undertakings and gentlemen’s handshakes. That

man, Peter Walsh — do not vote back in, voters — he is the biggest liar you will ever come across and will lie and lie.

I did not say that. That was said by Clinton Tilley from Australian Sustainable Hardwoods. Can I just say that that has not been my experience.

Ms Bath interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Just settle down, Ms Bath. I am about to defend Mr Walsh. Just settle down. Take a Bex and have a lie down.

That is not my experience with Mr Walsh. Let me say that my experience of dealing with Mr Walsh is that he has always been very honourable in the dealings that he has had with me.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — No, I am telling you. Mr Walsh has always been very honourable in the dealings that he has had with me. I put that on the record in *Hansard*. I will say it inside the house, I will say it outside the house that Mr Walsh and I get on very well and I have not once —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — No, Mr Ramsay. Let me tell you that never once have I had occasion —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I have not bagged the hell out of Mr Walsh, not at all. I reject that assertion. Go and read *Hansard*. What I said is that he rolled over because of Ryan Smith and the Liberals. There is a difference. I respect Mr Walsh. I have never had the experience with Mr Walsh personally that Mr Tilley described. I have always found Peter —

Ms Bath interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am being heckled by one of Mr Walsh’s members when I am defending him. This is hysterical. Let *Hansard* reflect that Ms Bath is heckling me while I am defending Peter Walsh, the Leader of The Nationals in the other place. This is like a *Twilight Zone* episode. This is preposterous. This is like me having some kind of existential crisis with the way that politics should be — that people on your own side defend you and people on the other side attack you. Here I am defending somebody on the other side and I am being attacked for it by one of Mr Walsh’s own colleagues, Ms Bath. This is just hysterical.

Let me say once more, hopefully without being heckled by Ms Bath, that in all of the dealings that I have had with him I have found Peter Walsh to be very honourable. I have found every discussion I have ever had with Mr Walsh, either in this place or outside this place, to be honourable. But that does not mean to say that The Nationals do not get rolled by the Liberal Party. That does not mean to say that they did not put up a good fight, but unfortunately they got out-muscled. That does not mean to say that that political giant, Ryan Smith, did not manage to get one over Mr Walsh in the other place.

That is pretty embarrassing and I can understand why The Nationals bristle at my trying to make that suggestion. I understand why because, quite frankly, they are not even close to being in the same postcode in terms of their political and policy aptitude. Mr Walsh has it far over Ryan Smith on pretty much every level on which you could actually assess a contribution from a member of Parliament except one — that is, Mr Smith got the outcome. That is about the only positive contribution I could make about the competition between Ryan Smith and Peter Walsh, that Ryan Smith won out on this occasion.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — It is funny that Mr Ramsay is piping up, because I may just spend the last 24 minutes of my time talking about when I was the chief executive of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries, because at that time Mr Ramsay spent some time as the president of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF). I look forward to Mr Ramsay's contribution because, let me tell you, the VFF used to hide him. Every time they had to make an announcement they used to roll out the chief executive and hope that the president did not turn up. When it came to forestry, poor old Mr Ramsay did not know one tree from another. He did not know what an ash species was, let alone a mixed species. He did not know what was state forest and what was national park. When it came to forest policy, let me tell you that the VFF had no idea whatsoever.

Fortunately, as the chief executive of the industry, I was able to do my own representation and did not rely on support from Mr Ramsay, because he went missing in action. We almost put out wanted posters in country Victoria saying 'Have you seen this man? Do you know where Mr Ramsay is? If you do, dial 000 because everyone needs to find him'. Secretly, the VFF were happy that he went missing. They did not want him speaking out on behalf of country Victorians because, as his interjections are proving, he is incapable of

understanding the timber industry and siding with rural and regional workers in the timber industry.

I welcome every interjection from Mr Ramsay, and I look forward, if he has a contribution to make, to listening very carefully to his contribution. Maybe he can explain the difference between mixed species and ash. Maybe he can describe where one is found and where the other is. Maybe he can describe what the difference is between softwood and hardwood. Maybe he can describe what the difference is between a green mill and a brown mill. I know that Mr O'Sullivan knows all of these details; I am not sure whether Ms Bath does, but I will give her credit and say she does because of a generosity of spirit. But I know for a fact that Mr Ramsay has no idea about the different definitions that I have just asked about — none at all. Maybe in his contribution he can actually try to reference them. Maybe he can try to do some work before his contribution, and we look forward to that contribution because if he stands up and talks about the differences between a green mill and a brown mill, if he stands up and talks about the differences between softwood and hardwood — —

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, Acting President, I have just come into the chamber. I was listening to this debate through the speaker in my office and this member has been reflecting on other members of this chamber. I think what he was saying about Ms Bath and Mr Ramsay was quite offensive, and I ask you to ask him to withdraw.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Thank you, Ms Lovell. There is no point of order. I remind members that if they do take offence, they should alert the Chair and I will make a ruling at the time. It is up to the affected members to ask for a withdrawal.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I appreciate Ms Lovell's contribution. She comes in and she makes a point of order, she gets denied and she scurries out of this place. She is a country — rural and regional — Liberal in this place too, and she was in cabinet when Mr Ryan Smith put through the prescriptions in relation to the Leadbeater's possum, but she does not want to be here. Currently in this place there is no-one sitting here that was in cabinet at the time. I would welcome Ms Wooldridge and Mr Rich-Phillips coming back in, I would welcome Mr O'Donohue coming back into this place and I would welcome Ms Lovell coming back into this place. Then I could put to them: what did they do and how did they speak up for country, rural and regional Victorians working in timber mills? What can they possibly say that could assuage the fears of timber

workers — that somehow they are now being used in a political stunt by those opposite?

The fact of the matter is that the timber supplier we have is the timber supplier that we have. That is the problem we are faced with. If there is additional scientific work, if there is additional forestry silviculture that can be undertaken that could increase the sustainable yield, then we on this side of the house would welcome that work being done. But the advice we have got from VicForests, which has some of the best forest scientists, is that at this point in time in order for VicForests to meet its existing contracts of supply — and I made this point very early on — with mills like Graeme Brown's in Noojee, or Powelltown, or Ryan & McNulty in Benalla, it cannot give ASH everything that they want. It just cannot do it.

If you have got existing contracts, then you need to be able to meet your obligations under those contracts, and if you do not have an existing contract — and there is not an existing contract past 30 June for Australian Sustainable Hardwoods — then this is the predicament we face. This is the contract reality that we are placed in. Why are we placed in it? Why is their contract running out on 30 June? I could hear you and see you thinking that question, Acting President, and it is a very good question. The reason we do not have a contract beyond 30 June is that the previous minister responsible for forestry, Mr Walsh, put forward a contract to be executed by the then Treasurer, and it was not executed. The former Treasurer executed a contract that cost billions of dollars to this state potentially in the east–west link, but he was not prepared to execute a contract for Australian Sustainable Hardwoods, and unfortunately that is why they do not have a contract. They do not have a contract, because the former government would not execute one.

So again they can jump up and try to pretend. They can try to play wordsmith games. They can try to say, 'It wasn't us', but the fact of the matter is it was 'us', in terms of 'us' being The Nationals and the Liberals. Unfortunately we do not have a contract. There is not a contract provision available, and there is not a contract provision available because those opposite did not execute a contract. You cannot not execute a contract and then complain that you have not executed a contract; it is a double negative. I note for *Hansard* that Ms Lovell has returned to the chamber. Maybe I can look forward to Ms Lovell contributing in relation to when she was a cabinet minister, about the role she played in Mr Ryan Smith's prescriptions, as we know.

As we know, the quantum of supply that was put forward by VicForests to Australian Sustainable

Hardwoods was a significant reduction on their current volume. No-one disputes that. It is an inescapable truth that there is a reduced volume because of the possums and the prescriptions put in place by those opposite in the previous government and also because of the catastrophic impacts of wildfire from the tragic 2009 Black Saturday bushfires.

At that point in time of course we had sympathy for the workers, their families and the plight of the town of Heyfield. Before Ms Bath knew where Heyfield was on a map, I was dealing with them on a regular basis. As I have said in this place before, I have been to towns as chief executive of the timber industry that people on that side would be unable to point out on a map with a magnifying glass. I suspect, Acting President Dunn, that you have a much better idea of the types of towns that I have been to, and I suspect that you have probably been to more of those towns in an activist role prior to entering Parliament than the Liberals and The Nationals bleating on that side of the place have been to themselves.

That is a credit to you, Acting President, because you are passionate and you believe in that policy. I do not agree with you, Acting President, on your views in relation to forestry vis-a-vis environmental protection; I think we can do both. I know that when you have had the opportunity to ask questions in this place you put forward a different public policy position, and I respect that. I respect that because you have lived it. Instead of just walking into this place mouthing platitudes and crying crocodile tears, you have at least gone out to these towns. You have probably been to Bendoc. You have probably been through Cann River. You have definitely been through Bairnsdale, and I know you have got to Orbost. These are all wonderful country towns, Acting President, and you and I know where they are because we have been there, but unfortunately those opposite who are crying crocodile tears would not be able to pick them out on a map with a magnifying glass.

Mr O'Sullivan interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr O'Sullivan is indicating that in fact he can, and I welcome the fact that he can. I think that is important, given that he was chief of staff to a minister that looked after forestry. I welcome that. I dare say in Mr O'Sullivan's contribution he will be able to talk about people like Bob Humphries, rest his soul, who was a wonderful, wonderful champion of the timber industry. He was often referred to as the mayor of Bendoc, because he ran the timber mill there.

Ms Bath interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am not struggling, Ms Bath. I am paying tribute to a man. If you had any feeling for the industry, Ms Bath, you would do well to be quiet because I am paying tribute to a man that, if you had any feeling for the timber industry, you would understand is considered to be a giant of the timber industry. He was a man that gave more of himself for the timber industry and for his workers and for that community than just about anyone else in the history of Bendoc, but it is too much for Ms Bath to be generous enough to allow me to make that point. He was somebody who gave of himself as president of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries over many, many years, on many different occasions, and somebody who worked closely with me and who I used as a mentor — somebody, by the way, who contributed greatly to the Liberal Party in donations. Bob Humphries donated to the Liberal Party.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Yes, I do know that for a fact. Bob Humphries was one of the greatest men in the timber industry that I got to deal with, and he always supported me and gave as much to me in my growth as chief executive in the industry as he could. Nothing was ever too much when I asked it of him. He always supported it. He was a great man, and God bless his soul. May his wife and Mitchell, Mitchell's children and his other grandchildren continue to remember a great man who loved them all deeply and loved the industry.

There are others. For example, Steven Jamieson lost his life fighting a fire up at Bendoc. He lost his life, and I paid tribute to him when I was the chief executive. So when Ms Bath in her contribution talks about the contribution of the global timber industry into local communities, I understand that better than most. I get it. I have seen it, I have witnessed it, I have experienced it, I have bled for it and I have sweated for it — blood, sweat and tears, you had better believe it. And Steven Jamieson, who was clearing a forested area as a subcontractor at the time to try to protect the township from the oncoming fire front, lost his life when his tractor tipped and rolled, and unfortunately he died in it.

These are very serious issues. We look at towns like Bendoc that had a primary school, and the children in the primary school were children from people that worked at the timber mill, so as the timber mill reduced in its importance to the community people had to move elsewhere for jobs. What happened to Bendoc was that the school then reduced its classes. The size was reduced. When a threat is in place, you have then got problems with the Country Fire Authority and the State

Emergency Service. The local football club, the local netball club and all of the ancillary benefits to a community of having a large employer — and in this case we are talking very specifically about the timber industry — are impacted by the closure of a mill.

I know that the threat of a reduction in volume to Heyfield will have serious impacts for the town. I am well aware of that, and it gives no-one any comfort that this is the potential impact. The problem we have got is that when you have a reduction in supply available the difficulty is meeting supply in terms of contracts wanted versus contracts already entered into.

This becomes a difficult challenge. When you add one challenge to another challenge to another challenge and you get to the issue we have before us in terms of the prescriptions that were put in place by Ryan Smith, the member for Warrandyte in the other place, in the last government — —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Again, it is unruly to respond to interjections. It is unruly to respond to interjections from the man who was missing in action when he was president of the Victorian Farmers Federation. It was unfortunate that that was the case. It is unfortunate that he continues to pay lip-service, because I will tell you at this point in the contribution I have made that has spanned nearly 50 minutes thus far — guess what? — that Mr Ramsay was a backbencher in the previous government when Ryan Smith, the member for Warrandyte in the other place, did his dirty deed protecting the possums at the expense of local timber jobs.

What representations did Mr Ramsay make, I ask? How many conversations did Mr Ramsay have with his colleague Ryan Smith to say, 'Ryan, you've got it wrong, buddy. What are you doing'? I want to know how many conversations he had. So when Mr Ramsay gets on his feet to make a contribution, I know all of us on this side of the chamber, anybody in the gallery, anybody listening on — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Can we allow Mr Dalidakis to continue his contribution without assistance.

Mr DALIDAKIS — All of us on this side of the chamber and those watching the Parliament from afar, online or in the gallery will wait for Mr Ramsay's contribution when he stands up here and tells everybody what he did so that it can be put in *Hansard*.

We will be able to see how many conversations he had with Mr Ryan Smith, how many times he tried to stand up for the timber workers and how many times he said, ‘This is wrong. This is bad policy. We need to change it’. Do you know what? *Hansard* will be very silent. There will be almost nothing that Mr Ramsay will have contributed, because I am putting my betting dollar on the fact that when Mr Ramsay gets up he will not tell us how many contributions he made, he will not tell us how many conversations he had, he will not tell us how many petitions he provided and he will not tell us how many phone calls he made. He will not tell us what he tried to do to defend the timber industry.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Mr Ramsay, I am on my feet. I have made a number of rulings in relation to this item on our agenda, and I ask that Mr Dalidakis be allowed to continue without assistance.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, Acting President. I appreciate your support. This is a contribution that those opposite just do not want to hear, because of the role they have played in this continuing crisis. I can understand that. I can understand why they are quite sensitive to that. I can understand why they do not like somebody on this side of the chamber standing up and pointing out what the truth is, pointing out what the facts are and pointing out what role they have played in the outcome we have at the moment.

Mr Ramsay — On a point of order, Acting President, I assume Mr Dalidakis is finished his contribution. I was going to make a point of order on relevance — —

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am sitting down until you make your point of order.

Mr Ramsay — There was no relevance in his previous commentary to the motion at hand.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! That is not a point of order, Mr Ramsay. I ask Mr Dalidakis to continue, and I draw him back to the motion.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Again if we look at the substance of the motion we have those opposite with crocodile tears trying to engender support in the broader community against a very difficult situation we have found ourselves in, where we have to deal with the issue before us of a reducing sustainable yield, the issue of existing contracts that need to be supplied and met and the issue of a contract that was not signed by those

in the previous government. We continue to have those opposite bleat, cry and pretend. They want to take issue with the fact that we have a situation that is largely of their making.

President, I welcome you to the chair. I am sorry you missed my contribution, but I will recap it for you later because I am sure that you will be interested in it as a supporter of the industry.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Thank you, Minister. You will have the call on the resumption of this debate.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

The Clerk — I have received the following letter from the Attorney-General relating to the resolution of the Council of 8 March 2017 relating to the business case for the proposed new youth justice facility for Victoria:

I refer to the Legislative Council’s resolution of 8 March 2017 ordering the production of the business case for the proposed new youth justice facility for Victoria, including any attachments or appendices, by 12 noon on 22 March 2017.

The government has identified two documents that fall within the scope of the Legislative Council’s order, and has assessed these documents against the factors listed in my letters to you of 14 April 2015 and 29 April 2016, which note the limits on the Council’s power to call for documents and the government’s approach to claiming executive privilege.

The government has determined to withhold both documents on the basis that their disclosure would be contrary to the public interest. Disclosure of these documents would, in each case, directly or indirectly reveal the deliberative processes of cabinet.

In compliance with standing order 11.03(a), the attached schedule refers to the documents in respect of which a claim of executive privilege is made.

Notwithstanding that the government has determined to withhold both documents, it has released information that is relevant to the Council’s request. That information is available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/news-media/news/alternative-location-announced-victorias-new-youth-justice-facility>.

The letter is signed by the Honourable Martin Pakula, MP, Attorney-General.

Ordered to be considered next day on motion of Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan).

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Parliamentary committee inquiries

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State. The purpose of parliamentary committee inquiries is to investigate issues before the Parliament and to help inform the legislation we are to vote on, but there is a trend of pushing ahead with bills despite committees being yet to hand down reports. Reforms to the taxi industry and new laws on synthetic drugs are just two examples where the government is pushing ahead with legislation despite parliamentary committees still hearing the views of experts and diligently investigating the issues. Given the government's approach of forging ahead despite committees being yet to hand down reports, can the minister confirm its commitment to listening to experts as part of its transparency and integrity agenda?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — Thank you, Ms Patten. The reason why I smile in response to your question is that it is a fair enough question. From the government's perspective we see some of the investigations which are sometimes imposed by the Council and sometimes across the Parliament and which may cause obstruction in relation to the legislative program as a bit of problem. From whatever end of that continuum you may start, there is an appropriate balance to be struck between the scrutiny of the Parliament, the way in which that scrutiny should be undertaken in accordance with obtaining expert advice for us to validate the technical and the legal elements of a piece of legislation and what programmatic outcome there might be that flows from it and the need to make sure — whether we do it as a committee of the whole or whether we do it as a committee of Parliament — that we acquit that obligation appropriately and with due consideration to how long that process should take.

For instance, I was somewhat aggrieved that a piece of legislation that had been on the notice paper for the best part of six months and was available to be debated about two or three weeks ago was in fact at that point in time referred off to a committee for what I thought was a moment of political opportunism. I thought that in fact if there was a real issue of substance to be assessed by a committee, that referral could have been made at any time in the previous six months while the piece of legislation was on the notice paper.

I do take your point that the government should be mindful of the due consideration of committees that have been established to investigate these matters and take those into account in the processing of the

legislative program. I will have a look at the appropriate balance that needs to be struck in relation to the two items that you have addressed. I just raise that for our collective reflection as a chamber as to how we think we get the right balance between the scrutiny of parliamentary committees, the scrutiny of the committee of the whole and the preparation of the legislative program. From my vantage point, with greater maturity, wisdom and reflection on how we get that balance right I think the chamber will work better and the parliamentary process will work better and the legislative program will flow.

Supplementary question

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — Thank you, Minister. I do note that the government has supported a number of the inquiries, particularly the ones that I mentioned, so obviously there was support for listening to those experts, but it seems that the legislative agenda has got ahead of that. So my supplementary question is: why does the government not delay its changes on synthetic drugs until after the Law Reform, Road, and Community Safety Committee has completed its inquiry into drug law reform so that the government can fashion its laws informed by the experts, like the 17 senior law enforcement experts who this week called for governments to work towards the decriminalisation of drugs?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I think ultimately the chamber will be forming a view on that subject, so maybe you are anticipating a matter that may be raised in the consideration of this piece of legislation by the time it gets to us. You have clearly put us on notice in relation to your view. Again, in relation to the commitment that I made to you in my substantive answer, the government needs to make an appropriate reconciliation between its desire to achieve the speedy and appropriate delivery of our legislative program, in accordance with either our commitments or the concerns that may be in the community about legislative reform, and the expectations of the Parliament and the process by which we get there. You have clearly flagged your position today. It probably will not be the last time that you flag it in relation to that matter. Without anticipating it further, I look forward to the next time that we have a discussion about it.

Australian Paper

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — My question today is for the Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development. If the Heyfield mill closes, the Australian Paper (AP) mill in Maryvale stands to

lose a lot of its pulp supply, which it needs in order to make paper. AP has a new paper recycling plant that may be viable on its own should the Victorian government buy all of its printer paper in the form of recycled paper from AP. I have been told previously that the government will not do so because it already has contractual obligations to purchase paper from elsewhere. My question is: given the multiple hits to jobs in the Gippsland region, what assurances can the government give to the workers of the Australian Paper mill that their jobs as well as those of Heyfield and Hazelwood are not at risk?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Bourman for his question and his interest in the future of Australian Paper, which is a very significant employer — very significant by any standards — and the largest private sector employer in the Latrobe Valley. It employs around 900 people, and of course there are then many others in the supply chain. The government is absolutely determined to ensure that we have the supply to meet both the legislated agreement and other contractual arrangements that sit alongside that to ensure that Australian Paper has what it needs. This is a company that has a very strong future in Victoria. It is a company that has had some challenges that I think are well known and well understood. They have been working, I believe very successfully, on what they have called project pivot, a turnaround project where they have properly evaluated all the inputs and outputs in the business. But I am certainly very confident that Australian Paper has a strong future, and I am very confident about our ability to provide the supply that it needs.

Supplementary question

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I thank the minister for her answer. She has partially answered my supplementary question. Other than buying a mill that is not for sale, what other initiatives, such as potentially buying Australian Paper-made Australian recycled paper, is the government looking at to protect jobs?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Bourman for his further question on what initiatives the government is taking to work with Australian Paper to support them having a strong future. What I can say is that I have met with Australian Paper executives on many occasions over the last two-and-a-bit years and I have met with representatives of the parent company, Nippon Industries, on a number of occasions, both here and in Tokyo. We have certainly made it very clear to that company that we believe that they have a very strong future in Victoria.

In terms of the nature of those discussions, I think there are probably limits to what it is appropriate to disclose publicly, but suffice it to say that we are certainly well aware of some of the challenges the company has been experiencing over previous years and also some of the great opportunities that exist. Our constructive discussions with both the company and the parent company will continue.

Duck season

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. On the opening weekend of the duck shooting season at First Marsh, near Kerang, I noticed the presence of quite a large number of children at the wetland. In fact I saw some children entering the water accompanied by an adult with a shotgun. Those children were walking into the water before the hour of 10.00 a.m. Sections 58C(1) and 58C(1)(a) of the Wildlife Act 1975 and regulation 18 of the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 allow children between the ages of 12 and 18 to be on the water without having undergone a waterfowl identification test. However, it is not clear from the act or the regulations what the status of children under the age of 12 entering the water during duck season is. Could you please clarify that status?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Ms Pennicuik for her question and her interest in this matter, which is no doubt interest in the safety of children in an environment where duck hunting is occurring. I am happy to undertake to provide Ms Pennicuik with some further detailed information about the regulations, controls and protections that exist in relation to children and in particular in relation to children under 12 years, and I will do so by tomorrow.

Supplementary question

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Thank you, Minister, for that. It is quite an important issue because under section 58C(1) of the act certain persons, such as those who are not in possession of a game licence, are not allowed on the water before 10.00 a.m. on the first day and also from 2 hours before sunset on each day of the opening season until 10.00 a.m. on the following day for up to three months of the duck shooting season, in effect handing over the wetlands to duck shooters for every morning of three months of the year. But at the wetlands on the weekend those without game licences — that is, duck rescuers — were being apprehended by authorised officers but no action was taken about these children entering water. So what advice is given to authorised officers with regard to children on the water?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Ms Pennicuik for her further question. I cannot help but reflect on living with a 12-year-old and on just how big they get.

Ms Pennicuik interjected.

Ms PULFORD — Yes. Ms Pennicuik has made some observations from her own visit last weekend and presumed the age of children. I have not been provided with any details prior to today by Ms Pennicuik or any other agency that is part of the enforcement effort around opening weekend around this issue. But if Ms Pennicuik is in a position to provide me or the Game Management Authority with further information, we will certainly ensure that that is followed up.

But in terms of knowing specifically the details, it is a little hard to comment further other than to reiterate my offer to provide Ms Pennicuik with further information about the controls and arrangements in place for children under the age of 12. But again, without knowing the details of the minors that Ms Pennicuik alleges were on the wetlands on Saturday morning, I think perhaps Ms Pennicuik might be making some assumptions, and I do not want to be overly drawn on those.

Drug law reform

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My question is for Minister Mikakos on behalf of Minister Foley. On Monday former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett and former New South Wales Premier Bob Carr launched the Australia21 report, along with former senior police, which called for the decriminalisation of personal drug use, for the introduction of pill testing at music festivals and for the realignment of our drug policies to focus on harm minimisation. It was great to see former premiers from both sides calling for dramatic change, but it is always disappointing when they do this after they have retired rather than actually taking the action that is required to do it while they are in power. My question for the minister is: will he take bold action and take on the recommendations in the Australia21 report?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question. Can I just say that the part of the preamble to her question relating to the new-found courage that former members do have is a sentiment that I share. What I will do of course is refer Ms Hartland's question to Minister Foley as the responsible minister for a response.

I can advise the member that I am aware that Minister Foley has invested a very significant amount of funding in relation to these issues — \$17 million of investment in key harm minimisation activities such as the needle and syringe program, the opiate substitution treatment program, overdose response and education and training on the use of life-saving medication and Naloxone. So there are harm minimisation activities that the government has invested in, and in the last financial year the Victorian government has invested \$192.5 million to support a wide range of drug treatment services and harm reduction initiatives, which represents a 12 per cent funding increase over the past two years. But I will be very happy to refer the member's question to Minister Foley for a more detailed response.

Supplementary question

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — Thank you, Minister Mikakos. Considering that this is a very comprehensive report done by senior police and former politicians, my supplementary question to the minister is: what is the blockage for this government to actually take on the issues, such as a supervised injecting room for Richmond?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank Ms Hartland for her supplementary question. In her substantive question she referred to this report and she did say that it is wideranging in nature and it does touch upon a range of issues. But specifically in relation to the issue of the safe injecting facility, as both the Leader of the Government and I have referred to in previous questions and debates in this house in relation to these issues, whilst there are currently no plans to introduce a safe injecting facility in Victoria, we will carefully consider the coroner's recommendations and respond to them in coming months, as is standard practice.

In addition to that of course we welcome the parliamentary inquiry that will commence later this year. We look forward to the recommendations of that inquiry as well. That will provide an important forum for various views to be canvassed around these issues, and I am sure that some of the individuals that have fed into this particular report that the member mentioned will be able to have that opportunity to provide their expert views to that parliamentary inquiry.

Metropolitan Remand Centre

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Corrections. The prison riot at the Metropolitan Remand Centre on 30 June and

1 July 2015 — the worst in Victoria’s history, according to the corrections commissioner — has left the lives of many hardworking prison officers destroyed. One such brave prison officer is Mr Matt Kent, who worked throughout the riot and on numerous occasions put himself at risk to protect others. As has been established elsewhere, clear warning signs of the coming unrest were either ignored or not given the weight they clearly warranted. The consequences for these oversights and failures have cost Mr Kent his career and his wellbeing. He has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, he is currently unable to work and he has suffered nightmares from that day. One of the things that makes Mr Kent so angry is that no-one has been held accountable for this human and financial disaster. Minister, on behalf of Mr Kent, can you tell the house who has been held accountable for the worst prison riot in Victoria’s history?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — I thank the member for his question. Firstly, can I say that it is highly inappropriate for me to make comment on an individual staff member or their circumstances, but this government takes the welfare of all government employees extremely seriously. Corrections Victoria continues to support any staff affected by the incident at the Metropolitan Remand Centre (MRC) in June 2015. All employees have access to counselling and support services, as you well know, and we will continue to provide those services. Senior management continue to work with prison staff to make sure that they feel safe and secure in their workplace. But it is clear that what happened that day is totally unacceptable. The riot was unacceptable, and those who took part are being investigated by police. It has cost the state tens of millions of dollars and has had a very personal effect on many, many staff. We have been very busy at work since that time repairing the MRC and strengthening and hardening its facilities, and I have talked about that many times in this chamber.

Ms Wooldridge — Who is accountable?

Ms TIERNEY — I would actually lay the blame, in terms of who is accountable, on the people over there, because Mr Walshe in his report determined that it was your government that allowed the overcrowding in that facility — and you well know that. A major contributing factor to that riot was your overcrowding.

Supplementary question

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I think we have reached a new low in playing politics with such an important issue. By way of supplementary I ask: following the riot, Mr Kent believes his wellbeing and

that of other prison officers was less of a priority than getting the prisoners out of their cells, with the pressure from prisoners’ lawyers and other advocates. It took a full eight months before Corrections Victoria even broached the issue of ‘people recovery’. Mr Kent felt abandoned and unsafe at work, and this made a terrible situation even worse. Minister, given you have failed to identify anyone who has been held accountable for the riot, will you now take this opportunity to do what your predecessors have not done and apologise to Mr Kent and his colleagues who worked that night during a riot that should never have happened?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — I thank the member for his question. The member is actually correct on one point — that is, that we have reached a new low. The new low is of the opposition not recognising that they caused the overcrowding in the prison system. That is documented in the Walshe report. The other matter, which the member has not raised, is that the issue he is raising, in terms of the individual, is a matter before the courts. I am not going to make any comment. It is inappropriate to make any comment, but I can say to you that the commissioner for corrections has on the public record encouraged all employees affected by the riot on that particular occasion to please come forward and contact the authorities — the local management at the Metropolitan Remand Centre. We are very sensitive of the fact that that was a horrific situation.

Metropolitan Remand Centre

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My question is again to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, your predecessor Wade Noonan promised that a review of the implementations of the Walshe recommendations would take place on the first anniversary of the delivery of his report — in other words, last December. That review has been postponed indefinitely because, in an extraordinary move — and you referred to this in your previous answer — WorkSafe is now taking the Department of Justice and Regulation to court for negligence. Minister, the Walshe review has never been released in full, and now the one-year score card on the implementation of those recommendations has not even been commissioned. Given this secrecy, what confidence can prison officers such as Mr Kent and the broader community have that such a shocking riot will not happen again?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — There is no secrecy around this. Indeed we are looking forward to Mr Walshe coming back and reviewing his recommendations. We look forward to that. We have acquitted those recommendations. The fact is that

Mr Walshe was to commence in January; however, there are a number of court matters that make it very difficult for him to fulfil that role. When those matters are dealt with Mr Walshe will be engaged to come back and review his recommendations and the implementation work we have undertaken, and I am sure he will have an enormous amount of confidence in what we have done.

Supplementary question

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I think it may be a little pre-emptive to predict what Mr Walshe may find from this government's work and that of the three corrections ministers. I ask by way of supplementary: the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee outcomes hearings were told the prison riot at the Metropolitan Remand Centre took a toll on a number of staff, with 26 WorkCover claims approved, 19 of which are currently ongoing. Minister, some of these prison officers have provided feedback to Mr Walshe as part of his review into the riot. However, I ask: will you agree to meet with Mr Kent, who is in the gallery today, and a group of those impacted by trauma following the riot so you can gain a greater appreciation of the toll it has had on these dedicated workers?

Mr Dalidakis — On a point of order, President, that was absolutely not apposite to the question. The question was specifically around the recommendations, and the supplementary question was to meet with somebody in the gallery — a complete non sequitur to the Walshe recommendations that were asked about in the substantive question.

Mr O'DONOHUE — On the point of order, President, the supplementary question is absolutely apposite to the principal question, because it is about the Walshe report. Mr Kent provided feedback through that process, and I have asked, as a result of that, for the minister to meet with Mr Kent and others.

Mr Dalidakis — That's not what you said.

Mr O'DONOHUE — It is exactly what I said.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I prefer thinking music rather than interjections. My view is that Mr Dalidakis is correct — that in fact the supplementary question does not go to the same matter that was raised in the substantive question. Furthermore, I am not sure that, if this question were to be posed, the minister would be circumventing an investigation and a process that is already underway.

That would really be for the minister to reflect on, but as it stands I do not believe the question is apposite. I will give you one chance to rephrase the question so it is actually apposite to the substantive question.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Thank you, President. Minister, in my substantive question I asked about the confidence prison officers can have in the government to prevent a riot in the future. Minister, will you meet with a group of prison officers, including Mr Kent, to provide them with direct evidence that you can guarantee such a riot will not happen again?

An honourable member — It is the same question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It is couched differently, and I am prepared to accept that. I might also just comment at this stage that references to people in the gallery are not allowed in the chamber during debate. Obviously we do from time to time recognise distinguished visitors, and I am sure that Mr Kent is a distinguished visitor of some note, but nonetheless that was an inappropriate reference in the course of this question period.

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — I always have got the rights and the care of workers on my mind. I have been an advocate for workers for many, many years, and it absolutely galls me that I have to confront this sort of behaviour from those opposite. I am always prepared to meet with people in any area that I have got a connection to. In terms of the specifics of what is being asked, I cannot comment publicly in respect of those issues, but I am always available to meet those involved in the sector, including prison officers, who work tirelessly for this community day in, day out and deal with very extreme situations.

Prisoner court attendance

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, the Secretary to the Department of Justice and Regulation told the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee at the outcomes hearings last month that during 2015–16 the number of prisoners in police cells exceeded 200 prisoners on 236 days, more than double the maximum agreed between Corrections Victoria and Victoria Police of no more than 100 prisoners in cells at any one time. This shocking record led to \$194 000 in costs being ordered by the courts in 2015–16 for 245 separate matters where prisoners were not presented to court in contravention of a court order. The recent case of Kyle Stewart, who despite being in custody was not presented to court, highlights the ongoing police cell and prison overcrowding. It was subsequently ordered by the Supreme Court that he be

released from custody. Minister, given this explosive decision by the Supreme Court to release prisoners from police cells if your department cannot deliver them to court, what are you going to do to ensure criminals and alleged criminals are not simply released onto our streets?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — Goodness me, you are in fine form today! The fact of the matter is that the system is under enormous pressure. That is not news to any single person who follows this area. There are good reasons why we have a system that is under pressure. That is because we have had a change in bail laws, we have had an increase in police officers and we have also encountered a range of crimes that have been committed in this state that are completely unacceptable. The police cells situation also needs to be closely monitored, as you well know — —

Ms Wooldridge — What are you doing?

Ms TIERNEY — Well, we are doing a lot more than what your government did, Ms Wooldridge. I remind you it was under your government that there were 372 people in police cells; that is an all-time record. You come in here and ask, ‘What are you doing?’, but you did absolutely nothing, and we are managing the best we can. I have got absolute, full confidence in Corrections Victoria and the corrections commissioner to continue to manage the system that we have found ourselves in as we lead to the Ravenhall facility coming online later this year.

Supplementary question

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — Minister, following the Stewart decision, how many criminals or alleged criminals have been released into the community in the past week because of your department’s inability to present prisoners to court in contravention of a court order?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — The proposition is completely skew-whiff, to say the least, but I do not have that sort of detailed information on me. I am prepared to provide that to you in writing, Mr O’Donohue.

Ravenhall prison project

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, the new Ravenhall prison is contracted to be open by 1 November. Given the delays with the rebuild of the Metropolitan Remand Centre (MRC) and the ongoing reduced remand capacity, you have recently advised the Geo Group that the prison must now accommodate a

50-50 split between sentenced and remand prisoners rather than 100 per cent sentenced prisoners.

Remand prisoners are usually held in maximum security, which is done to mitigate risk. Some prisoners new to prison will be coming off drugs, others will be angry at being incarcerated, while for some they may be at risk of attack or assault because of their type of offending or because they are involved in rival criminal gangs. The new Ravenhall prison is not maximum security but medium security, and it was not intended to hold 500 or more remand prisoners.

Minister, given this massively increased risk, what are you doing to enhance security to prevent another serious riot similar to the one your government failed to prevent at the MRC?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — Is it not interesting; the place is not even built and they are starting the scaremongering already. The fact is that the remand population in this state has dramatically increased in recent years. It started when those opposite were in government. We have, as a result of managing the situation, placed cohorts of remand prisoners in a range of prisons across Victoria. Yes, Mr Ramsay is correct: there have been conversations with the management of the new facility and there is an opportunity for the contract to be changed. And yes, there will be an ask for 500 remand prisoners. That will be taken into account in terms of all these services that will be provided within that prison, and that is a consequential change to the ask for 500 remand prisoners.

Supplementary question

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My supplementary question is: this major change in approach is happening nearly two and a half years after the contracts for the prison were executed and just eight months from when the prison is required to open, and is it not a fact that this is now occurring so close to opening date because you have had four corrections ministers in two years and you and your government have completely dropped the ball on running a safe and effective corrections system?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — I thank the member for his question. Mr Ramsay, I think if it could not be done, then we would have been told that it could not be done. What this demonstrates is this is an agile government that is responsive to the changing nature of the prison population. It is a good thing, and you should be applauding it instead of scaremongering the population.

Ravenhall prison project

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, on 16 September 2014 the successful consortium for the new Ravenhall prison was announced. A key consortium partner was the Werribee-based Gathering Place Medical Aboriginal Corporation. All members of the house would be aware of both the over-representation of Indigenous Victorians in prison and the high Indigenous recidivism rate. Having an Aboriginal corporation as a central partner in the delivery of services was an Australian first designed to enable Aboriginal prisoners to have consistency in the delivery of behavioural change and other programs from both within and later outside prison.

Minister, despite a memorandum of understanding existing between the operator, Geo Group Australia, and the Gathering Place, their services as the lead Indigenous service provider have been terminated. Minister, does the Andrews government support the termination of this agreement?

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Mikakos, it may be that you are suffering deprivation because you did not get the question; however, I do not need to hear the interjections.

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — Mr Finn, this government has got a very proud history of a relationship with our Indigenous communities across this state, and that is also being delivered in part with Minister Hutchins and the activities that she is undertaking in other aspects of portfolios of this government. But in terms of corrections, we stand proud of our relationship with our Indigenous stakeholders, organisations and individuals.

I was very pleased to be in Geelong last Thursday night to announce a whole range of programs that we are funding. As I stated in my ministerial statement this morning, \$2.5 million was allocated to a number of very important programs, and I announced a further \$710 000 for a pilot program that will be organised through three major Indigenous organisations and will be about the health and wellbeing of prisoners when they are released from prison. You come in here to try to besmirch this government in terms of its relationship with its Indigenous community, but we understand that Indigenous Australians are over-represented in our prison system and we are working tirelessly and with them to reduce recidivism.

Supplementary question

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — Despite the minister's total inability to answer that last question, I am an optimist and I will push on. The involvement of the Gathering Place in this project was aimed at reducing the over-representation of the Indigenous prison population, which under your government stands at approximately 8 per cent of all prisoners, even though Aboriginal Victorians represent less than 1 per cent of the adult population. Minister, given the important issues at stake here, what specifically are you doing to ensure this groundbreaking project, designed to reduce Indigenous incarceration and recidivism, is maintained?

Ms TIERNEY (Minister for Corrections) — We are very much committed to working very closely with our Indigenous community organisations. It is absolutely crucial that we have a very, very close relationship because of the challenges that we face in terms of the number of Indigenous people in our prisons. I am very concerned to see that we demonstrate great love and care for those that are in our care, and therefore I am quite concerned about the temper of this discussion today. What I can tell you in terms of the new Ravenhall contract is that the work we are doing there is with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and I am assured that the work that we will do in that space will be groundbreaking and will drive recidivism down in this state.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 9407, 10 580, 10 581.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Written responses

The PRESIDENT — Order! In regard to today's questions, on Ms Pennicuik's substantive question to Ms Pulford, Ms Pulford undertook to provide some information in writing in response to that, and that is one day. Ms Hartland's substantive question to Ms Mikakos was to a minister in the other place, Mr Foley, and that is two days. Mr O'Donohue's first substantive question to Ms Tierney is one day; Mr O'Donohue's third question to Ms Tierney, both the substantive and supplementary questions, is one day; and Mr Finn's question to Ms Tierney, both the substantive and supplementary questions, is one day.

Ms Crozier — On a point of order, President, regarding a written response I received from the Special Minister of State in relation to a question I asked, I received a response which referred to the cost to the taxpayer in relation to Ms Cassandra Kelly from the Treasury Corporation of Victoria. At the time I think the ruling was that the minister had two days to respond further. Those two days are up, so I am just asking for an explanation from the Special Minister of State as to why that has not been provided to date.

Mr Jennings — On the point of order, President, it is not for the first time I have had to give a response detailing my urging of my colleague to provide the answer that has either been sought by Ms Crozier or been reinstated by the President. I have urged my colleague to look at the form so that the response that is expected by the President may be acquitted. I have reminded him of this, and I will do so again because I am not in a position to be able to furnish it to the chamber today.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Western Victoria Region

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Regional Development. My question is: why has the development of the freight hub at the Ballarat West Employment Zone (BWEZ) stalled? The Liberal federal government committed \$9.1 million to the freight hub in 2014 and Major Projects Victoria ran an expression of interest process for the freight hub, which closed in February 2016. Since then we have heard nothing. BWEZ is critical to future job opportunities in Ballarat and must be supported to grow and not be stifled by government.

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning, the Honourable Richard Wynne. I was pleased to see the recent announcement of 100 000 new land lots and 17 new suburbs being created in the next two years, seven of which will be in my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region. This will surely keep us ahead of population growth and deliver the most housing possible to the market to suit the needs of Victorian families. The additional \$3.3 billion invested towards the state's public transport system and the \$1.1 billion towards our health system will make sure these areas support and meet the exceptional living standards Victoria is known for. The question I ask is: what work is the government doing to ensure these lots, especially

those in my electorate, come to market quickly after rezoning?

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport in relation to the notorious 902 SmartBus route. A constituent has raised this concern after I attended Nunawading train station last week. The 902 route runs north-south along Springvale Road and provides a necessary alternative to cars on an overly congested road. The highly utilised service often runs well over 20 minutes late during morning peak times, resulting in overcrowded buses and passengers who are unable to get onto the next bus because it is too crowded. In lieu of this, will the minister review the timetable of the route, increase the frequency of the service and investigate options for separated bus lanes?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport, and it relates to the extension of the South Morang train line to Mernda. On 6 May last year the member for Yan Yean in the Legislative Assembly indicated by way of Facebook that the train line was due for construction in 2016 and would be completed and opened in 2018. Right now there has been nothing done — no dirt turned, no sod turned, just some markers on the road — and the member for Yan Yean claims it will be open in 2018. Well, they have got a lot of work to do if they are going to get this thing open in 2018. I would like to ask the minister: can she provide me and the constituents of the Northern Metropolitan Region a date when the Mernda train line will be fully functional?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, the Honourable Martin Foley. My electorate of Western Metropolitan Region is a diverse and multicultural mix of hardworking people who are dedicated to their families and their community, and they are struggling with health, unemployment and housing-related crises. This of course requires government to intervene and provide proper health, unemployment and housing services. This is what the Andrews Labor government does for all Victorians. We are proud of our record on these matters, and we can justifiably say that proper and comprehensive social welfare services are at the heart of what this government is about. There is no doubt

about and no hiding the reality of the stresses on our social welfare system, and public housing is near the top of the list of government priorities. In my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region there are many people who are in need of public housing. Some are actually suffering from a housing crisis, so my question to the minister is: what is the government doing to alleviate this housing stress? Also, how many people are on the waiting list for public housing and what is the average waiting time for access to public housing?

The PRESIDENT — Where?

Mr EIDEH — In Western Metropolitan Region.

Northern Victoria Region

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I have recently been contacted by constituents who live on Stevenson Street in Murchison. They advise that the street was resurfaced early last year, leaving a join in the street between their property and a neighbouring property which is currently unoccupied. My constituents advise me that these works have created a hump in the road, and the side of the road has a noticeable hollow. Since this work was completed a significant vibration has developed through their home when heavy articulated vehicles travel on the road. My constituents advise me that they have met with VicRoads twice and been told by VicRoads that it does not consider there is a problem and nothing can be done to fix the concerns. The next stage of roadworks will not be until 2026. The constituents say they cannot live with the vibrations and associated noise for another nine years and are desperate for assistance. Will the minister look into the concerns raised by my constituents with a view to achieving a satisfactory outcome for them?

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Recently I had a conversation with people at Eastern Volunteers. As I am sure the President knows well, it is a not-for-profit volunteer resource centre that covers a number of local government areas in the east. They do some really important work in recruiting and training volunteers for all sorts of different charities and not-for-profit organisations, and that work is partly funded through federal funding, which they are concerned may cease soon. I ask the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, Martin Foley, who has responsibility for volunteers, whether he is aware of the potential federal funding being cut, and is there

anything more he can tell me about that particular issue so I can pass it on?

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Mr Dalidakis. Notwithstanding the fact that the Level Crossing Removal Authority is responsible for consultation in relation to the level crossing solutions along the Frankston line, recently there was a government announcement that would see seven businesses closed around the Kananook station area to accommodate the relocation of stabling yards from Carrum to Kananook. This would mean the loss of some 100 to 200 jobs in the area, and that also includes Page Bros Jayco of Seaford, which are on a 3-hectare site in the relevant area. They employ people in 50 businesses and are at a loss as to how they could be so callously treated. I am asking the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade whether he is prepared to meet with that group of small businesses in order to discuss their future and any other options for completing the level crossing removals without this policy that will impact on and close their businesses.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the interaction between VicRoads and Stella Alevizos, who lives on Punt Road. It is an important situation because we all support the step that has been taken on Punt Road to put the clearway there — it was Liberal Party policy — but the government has to implement this policy in a way that does not impact unfairly on communities. What has happened with Stella, and I have had a number of conversations with her, is that VicRoads has created so much dust and dirt and failed with water suppression techniques that her white home — her home that was in immaculate condition — is now a dark, dirty brown and the carpet and curtains have been impacted. I ask the minister: will he ensure that VicRoads behaves properly in this way and contacts Stella?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. For almost two and a half years now the Andrews government has been promoting a new toll road, the western distributor, as the answer to road congestion in Melbourne's west. Putting aside the ineffectuality of this project, it is clear the government

is working hand in glove with Transurban to provide a windfall to that company. I ask: what agreements does the Andrews government have with Transurban to deliver the western distributor, truly a dog of a project?

Sitting suspended 12.58 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

HEYFIELD TIMBER MILL

Debate resumed.

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — Thank you, Acting President. I appreciate the fact that you called on me with such gusto and enthusiasm, because you know that with the remaining 6 minutes I have I am going to remind the chamber a number of times about the unfortunate impacts that the previous government's decisions have had that have led us to the very situation we have found ourselves in.

As I was saying earlier, we are in this position today because those on the other side — and I notice that Mr Davis, Mr O'Donohue and Ms Lovell are in the chamber — were not prepared in the previous cabinet to stand up to their colleague in the other place, Ryan Smith. They were not prepared to say, 'We value CFMEU jobs'. They were not prepared to say, 'We value timber industry jobs'. They were not prepared to say any of that, because all they wanted to do was try to kill the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Yet today we now see them wanting to hug the CFMEU. So last time it was kill and this time it is hug. Unfortunately the Liberal Party has previously and continuously shown that when it comes to jobs in rural and regional Victoria they are nowhere to be seen or to be heard. They are like those three monkeys — see no evil, hear no evil, say no evil. Unfortunately that is the history of the Liberal Party.

I will contrast that with Mr O'Sullivan's previous and current boss, Mr Walsh, in the Legislative Assembly. Mr Walsh at least tries to believe in the industry. Mr Walsh believes in the industry; he just was not very good at putting forward the arguments to win the day in cabinet. He got rolled by his city cousins, the city-centric Liberals — and this is an inconvenient truth to those opposite. I have already told the chamber, Acting President — though not while you were in the role, I must say — so let me repeat myself for your benefit, if for nobody else's.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr Ramsay keeps interjecting from afar, but let me tell you: he was nowhere to be found when this issue came up in the last Parliament.

He did not stand up in caucus, in the Liberal party room, and say, 'We need to defend CFMEU jobs. We need to defend timber workers jobs'.

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, Acting President, I draw your attention to the standing order that relates to tedious repetition. We have had the same subject over and over and over again from Mr Dalidakis. I ask you to bring him back to the core aspects of the motion before us.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! At this point I will not uphold your point of order, Mr Ondarchie, but I remind Mr Dalidakis that tedious repetition is not allowed under the standing orders.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Acting President, it will be 3 minutes and 45 seconds.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! Mr Dalidakis, I had not finished. Tedious repetition is not allowed under our standing orders. I remind you of that and ask you to keep that in the front of your mind while making the rest of your contribution.

Mr DALIDAKIS — With 3 minutes and 20 seconds to go and without tedious repetition, let me remind those opposite that Ryan Smith, the environment minister in the former government, created prescriptions around the —

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, Acting President, albeit that you were not in the chair when the motion was being debated earlier today, I remind you that you have just given a directive to the minister to avoid tedious repetition and he has completely defied that order by coming back to the exact subject matter he was dealing with before lunch. If the minister has not got anything more substantive to say, maybe he could sit down.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr Herbert — On the point of order, Acting President, if there is one thing that is tediously repetitive, it is Mr Ondarchie's comments. There is nothing tedious or repetitive about Minister Dalidakis's comments.

Mr Ramsay — On a point of order, Acting President, I distinctly heard Mr Dalidakis call Mr Ondarchie a 'silly old windbag'. It is totally inappropriate and unparliamentary.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! Mr Ondarchie is present in the chamber, and if he wishes to draw attention to any comments that have been made, he may do so.

Mr Ondarchie — On the point of order, Acting President, I must admit I did not hear the minister say that, but it is not unusual given the level of highbrow contribution that we are used to from him.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! I believe there have been two points of order. I do not uphold either point of order, but I do remind Mr Dalidakis to remain on point with his contribution.

Mr DALIDAKIS — In the remaining 1 minute and 50 seconds I indicate that we now have a situation where those opposite cannot stomach hearing the truth. They do not want to hear that former minister Ryan Smith put the prescriptions, put the 12-hectare radius, around the possum sightings, and that Mr Ramsay, Mr Ondarchie, Mrs Peulich and Mr Davis did not stand up in cabinet or in their party room and tell Mr Smith that what he was doing was going to kill the industry. They now want to hug the CFMEU. They now want to pretend they are a friend of the worker. They now want to stand up here and raise points of order to try to stop this truth from being told.

Let me tell you that democracy will not stand in the way of the truth being told — that Ryan Smith and the Liberal Party are responsible and that members of The Nationals did their very best but it was not good enough and they got rolled by the Liberal Party. The Nationals got rolled at a state level and at a federal level. The federal environment minister listed the possum under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The former state environment minister put in a 12-hectare radius every time a possum was found, but this is an inconvenient truth for them.

Ms Bath interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Instead, Ms Bath wants to heckle me when I am defending Peter Walsh. That is what she did before lunch. She heckled me for defending Mr Walsh — the leader of her own party. She wanted to heckle me for defending her own boss, for saying in all my dealings with Mr Walsh I found him to be honourable — that I actually found him to be honourable when I dealt with him.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Morris) — Order! I am having difficulty hearing Mr Dalidakis's contribution. If members could lower the level of interjections I would appreciate it.

Mr DALIDAKIS — This motion is absolute rubbish, and that is why the Liberals have absolutely no credibility on the issue.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

NATIONAL FIREARMS AGREEMENT

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) acknowledges the legitimate recreational pursuits of sporting shooters and hunters;
- (2) recognises the contribution made to the economy and environment by recreational and sporting shooters in Victoria; and
- (3) notes that changes currently being proposed to the national firearms agreement would place unfair conditions on law-abiding firearm owners who have already proven to abide by stringent regulations that limit the use of firearms in shooting sports, recreational hunting and pest control.

It gives me great pleasure today to have a little chat with the house and to move that this house acknowledges a few things. The motion acknowledges that the sports of shooting and hunting are legitimate recreational pursuits. It recognises that we, the shooters, hunters, fishers and farmers, make a contribution to the economy and to the environment with our actions. I will go into tedious but not repetitious detail about that. Most importantly the motion notes that there are changes currently being proposed to the national firearms agreement (NFA) that would place unfair conditions on law-abiding firearms users. We already have a national firearms agreement that is quite stringent, and whether or not we like it we have to abide by it. Because of that we really do not need any more useless regulations.

Shooting and hunting have been under attack as recreations for a long time. I cannot even remember them not being under attack. You may wonder what sorts of problems we licensed shooters have been causing to warrant this sort of treatment. We are a group of men and, increasingly, women and juniors participating in a sport, a recreational pastime — whatever you want to call it — that encourages

responsibility, safety and environmentalism, as well as improving hand-eye coordination. It encourages a competitive spirit, and in some cases this results in international representation at Olympic and other events. Shooting is gender neutral and does not discriminate at all. All you need is an interest in it, and as long as you are not a criminal you can participate.

These are the people who are regulated by the Firearms Act 1996, not criminals. These are not the people, as I will demonstrate, who are the problem that society faces with regard to firearms crime. We are the people who practise, the people who train and the people who employ hundreds if not more people across Australia in an industry that used to be one of innovation but is now constantly being interfered with by governments of all persuasions, making the manufacture of anything firearms related an uphill battle. Having said that, there are some small operators working at making Australian-made products for Australia and international markets, despite these hurdles.

Shooting and hunting are legitimate pursuits. In fact, the human race has been hunting since humans became hungry, and we have been refining it ever since. Some in society do not like this, but whether they like it or not, meat does not just appear in supermarkets. It is not made in a plastic tray. It was once a living being, but we have become so divorced from the reality of it that hunting your own food is a problem but eating meat someone else has killed and butchered and put into a tray for you is not a problem. This disconnect is a sign of the increased urbanisation of society and its increased removal from the realities of life, rather than the supposed cruelty of hunting your own meat. I am at a loss as to how hunting and harvesting something in its natural environment when it has been living free and wild is worse than killing an animal that has been penned up for its life, herded onto a truck and then killed. Both are valid ways of obtaining your meat. It is just that some of us prefer to do it ourselves and control what we eat.

Game and pest species require careful and totally different management. Game species such as duck and deer need a different approach to pest species. Game species need their numbers reduced by hunting to reduce pressure on the environment. Deer numbers in particular have been increasing, but whilst recreational hunters have been taking in excess of 50 000 deer a year in areas we can hunt, we cannot hunt in most national parks, so the deer are breeding there unhindered. Given the greenies are against hunting, presumably their answer is to poison them or perhaps spend some hideous amount of money on helicopter shooters with dreaded semiautomatic rifles from New

Zealand. Apparently hunting is okay and hunting with a semiautomatic is okay if you get paid for it, not to mention that if poison is used an animal dies in agony over a few days rather than quickly from a bullet. Strange.

The fix, from my perspective and from a practical and ethical perspective, is to increase the area where recreational hunters can take deer. This can be managed on an area-by-area basis. Somewhere like Wilsons Promontory needs to be carefully and tightly managed, but then we have huge expanses of wilderness where a hunter or two could roam for a couple of weeks and not see another person, though hopefully they would see some deer to take. This could be done on a seasonal basis, where appropriate, and on a year-round basis everywhere else. In fact the management of hunting areas in the USA gives us some ideas on how the shared use of public land can be quite successful. Recreational game hunters have proven over the years to be safe and effective, free for the government and a practical and reasonable addition to the methods of controlling animal numbers.

Pest species need a different approach, and again this is where recreational shooters can help. Pest species need to be wiped out, and every effort must be made to make this happen. Rabbits and foxes are the predominant pest species that are hunted, and along with other methods we generally keep a lid on their numbers so that they are at an acceptable level. Wild dogs present a different issue in that numbers need to be reduced but care must be taken to ensure that dingoes or hybrids are not completely wiped out. Baiting and the recently reintroduced wild dog bounty help, but when hunting deer in the small areas of national parks where it is allowed you cannot take any pest species at all at the risk of your licence. The greatest irony of all is not being allowed to hunt pests in state game reserves. Hunting pests on land set aside for hunting game is not allowed. That is just strange.

My real interest in shooting was started by pest shooting on our farm back in the 1980s. Rabbits and foxes were the name of the game, and it was not unknown for us to take 100 or so rabbits in a night, plus a fox or two here or there. Even as recently as a couple of years ago I took 100 rabbits in an afternoon. Myxomatosis, the calicivirus and the new calicivirus are taking their toll, but that is still a lot of pest animals that would not have been removed if we had not done it. That was on one small farm of 600 acres. You can do the maths on how many pest animals there must be around Victoria and how out of control they would be without us recreational shooters.

We must also remember that a study commissioned years ago showed that hunting contributed about \$439 million to the economy of Victoria. That is a lot of money for anyone, including a government. You would think that every effort would be made to support hunters so that they would spend more.

Shooting is an Olympic and Commonwealth Games sport, but shooting on the international stage is not limited just to those avenues. There are many internationally recognised events that hold world championships. A few but not all of them are the International Practical Shooting Confederation, better known as IPSC; WA1500, which is another pistol event; and F-class rifle and so on. There are many more, but I will not do more than highlight the fact that there are many forms of competition that are providing a legitimate pastime for those wishing to shoot.

The proposed changes to the NFA ignore the occasional target shooter, the plinker and the person that just enjoys a finely crafted firearm or an antique from a couple of hundred years ago. Many people just have an heirloom firearm, something that is important because of its sentimental value. All of these pursuits, pastimes, recreations and sports are generally done by law-abiding, government-vetted individuals. Not a lot of criminals apply for a shooters licence, go about getting secure storage, practise at a certified range and compete in international events.

This brings me to the proposed changes to the national firearms agreement. Late on Friday, 17 February, the Council of Australian Governments — COAG — silently uploaded their review of the NFA to the commonwealth Attorney-General's website. This comes after 18 months of cloak and dagger discussions and no industry or community — at least shooting community — consultation, even though the minister advised there would be.

The NFA applies even more restrictions to law-abiding firearm owners yet the review provides no recommendations to combat the illegal use or possession of firearms. There are no recommendations to increase penalties for unregistered or unlicensed possession of firearms, penalties that have not increased since 2003. There is no focus by COAG on the criminal importation or the illegal manufacturing of firearms — the very issues that will actually give us a chance of improving safety in our communities. Instead further restrictions are imposed to punish members of the most law-abiding of recreational groups, people who are compliant with several pieces of legislation, not just the Firearms Act 1996.

The review of the national firearms agreement comes on the coat-tails of a decision taken many months ago to reclassify a firearm invented over a century ago based on it being new technology; in other words, based on conjecture, misinformation and scaremongering. How firearms operate is how firearms were initially classified. Somehow the way a firearm looks has become a measure of its supposed lethality as well. The Chief Commissioner of Police, presumably on advice, has had power delegated to make a change of category and therefore a change of licence required to own or use a firearm. The functionality of the firearm remains the same. It could be a bolt action, pump action, straight pull action — whatever — but it gets changed to another category, generally that of a semiautomatic rifle, based on how it looks. If looks could kill, this would actually have some validity, but that is just not how it works.

This brings me to the question of how these decisions were made and, more importantly, who makes these decisions. With a lack of credible, reliable advice and no information regarding the qualifications of the people involved in the making of these decisions, I have many unanswered questions regarding the transparency of the process. The minutes of meetings should reflect not only the content and decisions of the meetings but also conflict of interest declarations. What about the experience of committee members with extensive technical expertise? What are their specialist firearms qualifications? For that matter, I am told that in Victorian government, irrespective of formal qualification, someone with more than three years experience in a role is considered a subject matter expert despite their knowledge or lack of the same.

The Victoria Police licensing and regulation division website states that when reclassifying a firearm the classification review committee includes:

- a person with no expertise with regards to firearms;
- an operational member of police;
- two people with extensive technical expertise (one of which is independent of LRD); and
- a person with extensive knowledge of import permits.

Where are the minutes of this decision-making process? How do we verify that the information is factual? Again I ask: what are the qualifications of the members with extensive technical expertise?

The same goes for COAG. We are told that members from each jurisdiction, including the commonwealth, are present. What are their qualifications? How do we verify their expertise? If I had a heart condition, I would

not see a plumber. If I had a problem with my plumbing at home, I would not get on the phone and get a cardiac surgeon, would I? So why would I have someone with no knowledge of firearms on these panels or committees? It is just faceless bureaucrats continuing to make policy decisions, and in one case being specifically selected for having no expert experience.

As Aldous Huxley said, 'There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception'. My perception, which I know is a perception shared by many in the shooting community, is that we have faulty advice given by faceless and unelected bureaucrats with little or no knowledge of what they are making policy about. Indeed it is a brave new world.

Whilst thinking about experts, this is one of my favourites: the anti-gun crowd have a widely acclaimed expert who holds the title 'adjunct associate professor'. This expert, who has no academic qualifications or training, has stated to the media that he attended university without enrolling. He enjoyed smoking drugs and lived in the hippie drug world. He makes claims that dealers are importing more firearms than ever, yet makes no mention of the fact that these dealers could be acting on behalf of the number of law enforcement agencies that have fully replaced their stocks, whether it is completely re-outfitting all serving members or replacing ageing equipment.

We also have the transition of our border protection agency, which has increased its use-of-force provisions to arm greater numbers of its officers. We are talking tens of thousands of handguns for the government. His words are so flawed and his premises are so indefensible that they should never be used by any credible authority. Yet his tenure at a university remains and the public continues to finance his research, which is nothing more than dogmatic tripe. Never let the truth get in the way of a good story, it seems. Blaming law-abiding people for the criminal element's misdeeds is at the heart of the message peddled by our adjunct associate professor. It is pure propaganda. It would seem that licensed shooters are the cause of all society's ills if you believe it, despite how illogical this is.

On licensing, the licensing of shooters is one restriction I wholeheartedly agree with. The government does have a responsibility to ensure that unsuitable people cannot get a firearm legally. Licensing is a basic method of doing that, but once you have proven to be a suitable person and have been issued with a licence by the government you should not be the focus of a never-ending tightening of restrictions.

Prerequisites for submitting an application for a number of categories of firearms licence, including for handguns, included fingerprinting and a national police check, at the expense of the applicant, along with the very same national police check that is undertaken by the licensing and regulation division when the application is processed. These extensive criminal history checks against Victorian and national law enforcement databases are also undertaken every time an application for a permit to acquire a firearm is submitted. On top of this continued data matching, a subsequent review takes place for the life of any licence, and should any licence-holder have pending charges for offences that may compromise their firearms licence, action to suspend the licence and seize the firearm is taken swiftly. So there are already plenty of restrictions on who can and cannot have them.

The requirement for fingerprinting was introduced a number of decades ago. I have it on good authority that the agreement that was reached all that time ago was that fingerprints would be taken at no cost to the licence applicants; however, an increased fee for a handgun permit would apply — a fee that now increases every year along with the cost of fingerprinting, which is now about \$180.

Clearly getting your fingerprints taken for a handgun licence is no longer free, so presumably the permit to acquire one should not be indexed given the agreement is no longer valid! And that was sarcastic. So I asked the question: how many actual applications have been refused due to fingerprints being connected to criminal activity? Has the fingerprinting process actually led to an arrest for a crime where fingerprints exist but have not been identified? I asked the government to provide stats on this very issue, only receiving a response directing me to the Crime Statistics Agency.

Getting onto the Crime Statistics Agency, which is now responsible for collating, analysing and disseminating statistics on crime in Victoria, there seems to be a vagueness or generalisation of reporting. The category of weapons and explosive offences is too broad, providing no real snapshot of firearms offences. Even when breaking down to the police service area or local government area, offences are only broken down to weapons or explosives. Looking at previous years knife crime makes up the majority of these crimes, with firearms only being about 10 per cent.

Up until 2015 Victoria Police provided annual crime statistics. Weapons and offences were categorised to the type of weapon, including to the breakdown of different firearms types. In the Victoria Police report for 2013–14 armed robberies accounted for 1254 of all

robberies — in other words, 48.5 per cent for that year, which was a decrease of 13.3 per cent since 2012–13. The most common weapon used in armed robberies was a knife, 52.4 per cent, where 10.7 per cent of all weapons used in robberies were a firearm, including imitation firearms, being a decrease of 5.2 per cent. In that same report knives were the most commonly used weapon for assault and accounted for 1290 incidents, or 28 per cent, an increase of 6.1 per cent on the 2012–13 figures. Coming in at a quarter of that figure, 356 firearms, including imitation firearms, were used in assaults, a decrease of 2.7 per cent from the previous year. So you can see a pattern here.

With the Crime Statistics Agency lumping in firearms with weapons offences there is no clear data on whether firearms offences have in fact increased, and with the previous evidence of certain weapons crimes decreasing, why all of a sudden have weapons and explosives crimes increased by 18 per cent for 2014–15? Without the breakdown of data as provided by Victoria Police in the previous years it is really impossible to draw conclusions from the current data. If the media and these committees really realised the inaccuracy of the data, would they stop the fearmongering, the spreading of misinformation and the further restriction on the law-abiding?

As for the Crime Statistics Agency it would be nice to see a comprehensive and specific set of statistics that provide an accurate snapshot. Maybe then we will see accurate reporting and a sensible and logical approach to the regulation that is in fact based on whim and emotion.

I have to mention the ideology of the Greens, our main opponents on these sorts of things, who in the face of facts and figures peddle emotions to further their sanctimonious cause. Their policy is to make our streets safer by banning the private ownership of semiautomatic handguns that are already heavily restricted, as if the thousands of law-abiding firearms owners are the cause of these problems. It is as if no-one actually seems to accept that there is a knife crime problem and that knife crime exceeds handgun shootings by the thousands.

In 2015 there was one — yes, one — homicide committed with a handgun. It is no secret that the Greens are about regulating law-abiding people, but they refuse to stand up for a police officer who has been murdered. All I can say is that, while they direct their intellectual dishonesty towards the law-abiding, they are enabling the criminals. If they really want to make the streets safer, they should try working on an issue that exists.

Here is something that will get you thinking: while the national figure for road deaths in 2015 saw 252 deaths on Victorian roads and over 1200 nationwide, with injuries exceeding 10 000 annually, in recent years these have been on the rise even with increased road safety, the expenditure campaign and police presence on the roads. In that same year firearms deaths were 38 in Victoria, comprising two homicides, 35 deemed suicide and one undetermined. These stats show on average a steady decline over the past 20 years of firearm-related crime. There is never any mention about whether they are legitimate or illegitimate firearms. The fact is that you are far more likely to be the victim of a road death, stabbing or bashing than of being shot. If you do not believe these figures, feel free to take a look at the Australian Bureau of Statistics website. The Australian Institute of Criminology is a good read too.

We have the governments of Australia investing so much time and money into further regulating a select issue that is clearly not an issue and spending \$10.5 million in Victoria alone that could and should be spent on other areas, such as working on solutions to family violence, which is a real problem and which could use all the money possible to help battered family members to escape that cycle.

One of my pet hates is firearms registration. Many times I have been told that the registration is in the public interest. Okay then. Early on in my term here I asked the government how many crimes registration had solved, just to be advised that the data is not held. Given that it costs about \$10.5 million a year to run a registry, it would be nice to know if we were getting some value for money. The reality is that registration will not solve anything, as clearly law-abiding people are not likely to commit a crime with a legally registered firearm, not to mention that if a firearm is stolen, the registry does nothing, as criminals do not ever call the police to tell them where they are keeping their illegally obtained and held firearms.

This means then that part of the national firearms agreement that links all of the states' registries together, notwithstanding technical issues, is going to be nothing more than a monumental waste of taxpayers money that could be spent elsewhere on tangible benefits — perhaps better border controls to stop the flow of illegal items, including firearms, through what are widely acknowledged to be porous borders.

The picture I hope I have painted is that we have a group of law-abiding citizens who have been the focus of government attention over the decades at the cost of an out-of-control criminal element, and the most telling part of the old or new national firearms agreements is

that not one part of them is aimed at combating that criminal element.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I rise to speak on Mr Bourman's motion and look forward to the opportunity to talk about some of the work that the government is doing to support those in the Victorian community who participate in hunting and to share some observations about the economic benefits that flow from that.

Mr Bourman's motion comes in three parts, however, and the third part is unfortunately going to prevent us from being able to support it as it currently stands. I propose an alternative set of words, though, and I have had an opportunity to discuss this with Mr Bourman outside the chamber. I seek to move an amendment to Mr Bourman's motion, and I ask that it be circulated. The effect of the amendment is to change the third point in Mr Bourman's motion, and I move:

That all words after 'notes' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place the words 'that the state of Victoria, like all other Australian jurisdictions, continues to support the national firearms agreement as it provides a nationally agreed and consistent set of conditions that provide certainty for law-abiding firearm owners and maximises public safety outcomes'.

I will come to that in a moment, but first I would like to state that the Andrews Labor government does consider hunting a legitimate recreational activity and it respects the fact that many people in the community have deeply held and divergent views about some forms of hunting. Our government believes that hunting in Victoria should remain safe, responsible and sustainable.

As all members are aware we have canvassed issues relating to the opening of duck hunting in the Parliament on a couple of occasions this week. This is a particular time of the year when the contrasting views in the community come into sharp relief. There were around 4900 licensed hunters participating in the opening weekend of duck hunting at wetlands that were patrolled by a multi-agency effort to ensure that activity was safe and within the rules. Similarly we had numbers of protesters also expressing, as they do each year, their view about duck hunting and about opening weekend.

Hunting does continue to grow in popularity, and it does make a significant contribution to the state's economy. An estimated \$439 million flows into towns and regional centres across Victoria, supporting approximately 3500 jobs. I have spoken to people operating small businesses in communities that are on

the receiving end of this inflow of hunters, and it is their biggest, busiest weekend of the year.

Ensuring that hunting can be safe and sustainable for future generations is something the government has been putting some effort into. In Victoria we do like to celebrate having the best of everything. With our deer, duck, quail, pheasant and partridge populations, many hunters from around the country recognise that we have some of the best hunting opportunities in Australia, which are of course also very much enjoyed by Victorian hunters. We understand the importance of education, awareness and communication, and that is why our government has been supporting hunters in a number of ways since we were elected.

The 2016–17 budget set aside \$5.33 million to support this. The funding has supported government agencies working with hunters to improve the promotion of responsible hunting, provide better hunting opportunities and ensure our game species remain sustainable. The Australian Deer Association has been supported to coordinate its members participating in controlled culls of invasive deer species on public, and some private, land. Funding has flowed to the Firearm Safety Foundation (Victoria) too. The foundation educates gun owners and shooters about the responsible and safe storage, handling and usage of firearms.

Late last year I launched the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan: 2016–2020* (SHAP). The four-year plan sets out a multimillion-dollar investment to support Victoria's 50 000 game hunters. The plan marked a significant milestone for game hunting in Victoria. Never before have community and government partnered to develop and identify so many measurable outcomes. Over the next four years the government will work with our agencies and hunting groups to promote responsible hunting; to maximise the economic, environmental and social benefits of hunting in Victoria; to improve hunting opportunities; and to ensure that game hunting remains sustainable. I have asked the Game Management Authority (GMA) to provide me with a quarterly report, indeed one that I fully expect to be a public report that can sit on the GMA website for people who are interested in seeing the updates on each of these identified actions so that people who are interested in the progress of the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* are able to see the progress as these measures are rolled out.

In contrast with the hunting initiatives of the former government, ours are backed by necessary funds. Our plan is funded, and therefore it will be delivered. The government's *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* sets out practical objectives for the Game Management

Authority; the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources; and Parks Victoria. There are 22 clear and measurable actions that the government will undertake between now and June 2020.

Some of the key actions within the plan that the government will be delivering are the implementation of the waterfowl adaptive harvest model, which will provide a more robust system for monitoring and declaring each duck season, where we have made some improvements, but I think there is certainly room for further improvement; an improved game licence system, which will allow hunters to pay licence fees online, which sounds fairly straightforward but is something hunters are keen to be able to do as our world and all of our lives move increasingly online; improved and more accurate maps of hunting areas, which will allow hunters and non-hunters to better understand where hunting may occur; and a deer management strategy and easier processing of wild deer meat, which will allow hunters and landowners to better manage deer, particularly in the north-east of the state.

The government is also committed to partnering with Victoria's traditional owner groups. That is why the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations has been invited to be a member of the SHAP's project control board. As part of the actions we have committed to, the government will also be partnering with traditional owners to develop a traditional owner game hunting strategy to improve hunting opportunities for traditional owners. I have had a number of conversations with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Natalie Hutchins, about the desire of traditional owner groups to progress this work, and we look forward to supporting that.

Hunting opportunities are available on both public and private land. Victoria's public land provides for a wide range of uses, and the government recognises that this diversity of recreational opportunities is important to the community. A substantial proportion of the state's public land is available for recreational hunting, including large areas of state forest and hundreds of state game reserves. In August Victoria's 200th state game reserve came into being. As Mr Young and I discussed in question time in the last sitting week, there has been a recent audit which I think shows us all the work that needs to be done to improve access to and amenity in some but perhaps not all 200 state game reserves, but I think the audit demonstrated there is a good bit of work to be getting on with there. The Kerang State Game Reserve includes Foster Swamp and Crown land along Pyramid Creek east and north-east of Kerang. This is our 200th state game

reserve, and its creation demonstrated the value of the area for waterbird habitat and for hunting.

The government has also allowed the hunting of hog deer at Snake Island in South Gippsland under a two-year trial. Commencing this year the trial is providing a prized opportunity for safe and sustainable recreational hunting of hog deer in the area. Balloted hunting on Snake Island follows the successful model that has operated at the Blond Bay State Game Reserve and Boole Poole Peninsula for nearly three decades. Up to eight hunters are permitted to hunt at any one time, with a range of safety measures in place to protect other users. Opening up Snake Island to balloted hog deer hunting is bringing new visitors into the region and is being conducted in a way that minimises the impact on other users of Snake Island. Sustainable hunting requires sound game, conservation and land management. It must also incorporate the principles of responsible, safe and humane hunting to ensure environmental, economic and social benefits are maximised.

Since 2001 the total number of game hunters has increased by about 70 per cent, from just under 30 000 to over 50 000. Of the 50 000 hunters that are now registered, 34 321 are licensed to hunt deer, 25 753 can hunt ducks and 28 693 can hunt quail. Many of the state's hunters come from regional Victoria, with three Gippsland postcodes — Traralgon, Bairnsdale and Moe — topping the list of the most licences held, followed by Werribee and Wodonga.

In 2013 the former Department of Environment and Primary Industries commissioned research by RMCg, EconSearch and DBM Consultants into the economic value of hunting. The total expenditure for hunting game animals was estimated to be \$282 million. When pest hunting by game licence-holders was included, the estimate was \$417 million — 42 per cent on off-trip expenditure items and 58 per cent on on-trip expenditure items. Of this expenditure, 40 per cent occurred in metropolitan Melbourne and 60 per cent in regional Victoria.

The direct gross state product impact of game hunting by game licence-holders in 2013 was estimated to be \$118 million, with flow-on effects of \$177 million, giving a total contribution to gross state product of \$295 million. There were an estimated 1115 full-time equivalent jobs generated directly by hunting-related expenditure, with a further 1268 jobs stemming from flow-on employment, and we recognise the significance of those numbers. When pest hunting by game licence-holders is included to give the economic impact

of all hunting effort by licence-holders, the total impact is \$439 million.

Hunting activity is concentrated in certain areas, with the highest concentration of hunting being around Mansfield, where hunting accounts for 2.5 per cent of the local government area's economy. It is also economically significant in the Murrindindi and Gannawarra shires.

In paragraphs 1 and 2 of Mr Bourman's motion we have much to agree on. But I now come to paragraph 3 and Mr Bourman's wording and my amendment, and I will make some comments on the national firearms agreement (NFA). The government understands that the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party does not particularly like the national firearms agreement, but I do know that Mr Bourman, Mr Young and of course many others are committed to firearm safety and responsible gun ownership. The government absolutely supports the rights of legal firearms owners, but we respectfully disagree with Mr Bourman's party on the NFA. The government strongly supports the national firearms agreement and a sensible and consistent approach to firearms regulation across Australia. The agreement was, as members are perhaps aware, first developed in the wake of the Port Arthur shootings in 1996 under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, John Howard. It is also important to note that the current NFA recognises the rights of legal firearms owners and enshrines them in the agreement.

Mr Bourman spoke about the classification of lever action shotguns. No?

Mr Bourman — No, it was based on appearance.

Ms PULFORD — Well, Mr Bourman and I have had a number of discussions about the classification of lever action shotguns, but I also take this opportunity to point out a number of other changes that have been made in that refresh of the national firearms agreement. The classification of rim-fire rifle-shotgun combinations has also changed. Under the original agreement break-action shotgun and rifle combinations were classified as category B firearms. However, this is inconsistent with the way other non-repeating rifles and shotguns are classified. It is also inconsistent with their classification under state and territory legislation. The classification of break-action shotgun-rifle combinations is now dependent on whether the rifle is rim-fire — that is category A — or centre-fire, category B. As all combinations were category B under the original agreement, this change has resulted in rim-fire rifle-shotgun combinations being categorised as category A shotguns.

Another change that has come about as a result of the recent discussions at a national level is to remove the home address from a shooters licence. The NFA signed in February removes the requirement that all firearms licences must include the home address of the licence-holder. This requirement had caused some concern among legitimate gun owners whose wallets may have been stolen or lost — concern naturally arising that people who should not have firearms might have information about where the owner of the gun lives and that they own a gun. So the new national firearms agreement of February 2017 has deliberately omitted the requirement that firearms licences must be endorsed with the holder's address. For many hunters and for people who have other legitimate reasons to have weapons, this is a very welcome change.

I think it is important to note that all Australian governments, now and in the past — Labor and coalition alike — accept that public safety can only be improved by the safe and responsible possession, carriage, use, registration, storage and transfer of firearms. People with a genuine reason for possessing, acquiring or using firearms can still do so. The NFA is intended to help us tackle the issue of illegal guns in this country, not those held by fit and proper people. Last year the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission released a report entitled *Illicit Firearms in Australia*. The report estimates that there are 260 000 illegal guns across Australia. Of these, 10 000 are estimated to be illegal handguns, but 250 000 of that number are estimated to be longarms such as rifles and shotguns, and many of these are thought to be from the so-called grey market.

On 9 December last year, at the Council of Australian Governments, first ministers again confirmed their commitment to a national approach to firearms regulation. The strength and integrity of the NFA do rely on national consistency, and different jurisdictions cannot pick and choose which elements of the NFA they support or do not support. To do so, we believe, undermines the integrity of the NFA. It is important to note that every police force in the country has supported the NFA and the reclassification of lever action shotguns.

Whilst the government does acknowledge the position of Mr Bourman and his party, the government does support the NFA and will continue to support the NFA as we believe a nationally consistent approach to firearm management has been and remains the best way to keep people safe and to do so without unduly limiting the rights of legal firearm owners.

I imagine that Mr Bourman will not much like the amendment that I have moved, but we certainly offer it in the spirit in which I have contributed to the debate. We are proud of the work that we have done on the Sustainable Hunting Action Plan and in providing funding in last year's budget to back in that good long list of initiatives. We are looking forward to working with the hunting community to get that list done and to provide more opportunities for people to participate in hunting in a way that is safe and sustainable.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to speak as the first speaker for the coalition on this important motion, and it is an important motion because the issue of firearms and firearm safety is one that is relevant to all members of the community and impacts all of us. The issues Mr Bourman has raised in his motion in relation to the legitimate recreational pursuits of sporting shooters and hunters and, in paragraph (2), recognising the contribution made to the economy and environment by recreational and sporting shooters in Victoria are points that are acknowledged by the opposition and indeed strongly supported, because from my perspective as a member for Eastern Victoria Region I know that recreational hunters and shooters do bring significant benefits to the economy, particularly through the Gippsland region.

Farmers and others also play an important role in managing or helping to manage feral animals. In East Gippsland we see far too often feral dogs, cats and other animals that kill livestock and cause all sorts of issues, particularly in more remote areas. I think the farmers themselves and others can play a very important role in helping to manage those populations, which is in the interests of the environment. It is in the interests of the economy, and obviously for farmers themselves it is very important for them to be able to manage their animals and also reduce what can be a horrendous trauma that dogs — feral dogs in particular — can inflict on animals. I think those points are very well made, and I have noted Mr Bourman's comments in relation to that.

I think by and large it is widely agreed that sporting shooters are responsible and they should not be subject to excessive regulation. Sometimes the devil is in the detail when you try to define that, but I think it is important to recognise that the biggest threat to community safety from firearms comes from illegal firearms. I noted with interest and concern a report last week in which it was estimated that 5000 weapons were prevented from being imported into Australia by alleged bikies — or outlaw motorcycle gangs — and other organised crime entities because of the great work of the Australian Border Force, the Australian Federal

Police, Victoria Police and other state police forces coupled with international partners.

To me this is where the great challenge for the future is, and I know Victoria Police is doing a great deal of work in this space and is working very cooperatively with the federal agencies. As organised crime syndicates become more sophisticated, as their international links expand and as technology improves, the challenge for law enforcement to keep illegal firearms out of the country will grow and interrupting that illegal importation will become more and more challenging. Governments — it does not matter which government, where they are or of what political persuasion — will need to make sure that those different agencies are given resources and that they work together in a seamless way to interrupt, disrupt and stop that importation, because I think that that is a major issue.

I think it is fair to say that the national firearms agreement, introduced by John Howard with the support of the states, has served the country well since the Port Arthur tragedy, but technology is ever-changing and it is important that regulations are reviewed from time to time to take into account this situation.

The opposition will not be supporting the amendment moved by Ms Pulford. Let me say, in concluding my remarks, that the biggest challenge facing law enforcement agencies and the biggest risk to community safety is the illegal activity of criminals and the importation of illegal firearms, and that is one of the reasons we committed some time ago to the creation of a new criminal offence for drive-by shooting, because we have seen a spate of drive-by shootings in Victoria and we have seen an ever-deteriorating community safety environment in Victoria, with crime up over 20 per cent in the two years of the Andrews government.

I congratulate Mr Bourman for moving this motion, and I acknowledge the contribution made by sporting shooters, hunters and recreational shooters in a range of ways to the economy and in helping to control feral animals. Collectively we must redouble our efforts to ensure that illegal firearms are kept out of Australia and that this sort of criminal activity is reduced as much as possible.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I will have to say from the outset that the Greens will not be able to support the motion moved by Mr Bourman today regarding sporting shooters and hunters, the so-called contribution made to the economy and the environment by those activities and the role of the

national firearms agreement (NFA) in Australia. I would like to address separately each of the points that Mr Bourman has raised in his motion. The first part of the three-part motion that Mr Bourman moved today asks that this house:

acknowledges the legitimate recreational pursuits of sporting shooters and hunters ...

I note that Mr Bourman has used the term 'sporting shooters and hunters' but that every other speaker, including himself really, referred to recreational hunting in this context today and did not mention much about, for example, target shooting. It has not been mentioned in the motion, so I will not mention it either. I will concentrate on the recreational hunting side.

I turn now to the word 'legitimate'. People would understand that the word legitimate has two main definitions. The first is of course that an activity is legal or lawful. Sadly in Victoria the activity of recreational duck shooting, for example, is legal and lawful under the Wildlife Act 1975 and wildlife regulations. Of course the Victorian and Australian Greens are opposed to recreational hunting on public land and have called for a very long time for a ban on recreational shooting of our native waterbirds. It is something that I have pursued the whole time I have been in Parliament and indeed before I entered the Parliament. While it is lawful, I would make the comment that under the other definition of legitimate, which is the definition that something is widely accepted by the community, I would say that duck shooting, for example, is not legitimate, because the majority of Victorians — between 80 and 90 per cent — have been shown time and again to be opposed to duck shooting. It is not legitimate in that sense. It is not legitimate in the sense that is not accepted by the community. I take issue with that first definition of legitimate whilst acknowledging that duck shooting is legal under the Wildlife Act.

In order for a lawful activity to have any legitimacy in the community it must in fact be enforced. I would like to take the opportunity now to elaborate on my experiences of the opening of the duck shooting season last weekend, which I mentioned briefly this morning in my members statement. I was not able to say too much in the 90 seconds that we each have for members statements every week, but I did say that what I witnessed at First Marsh just outside of Kerang was one of the worst things I have ever seen, and I have been going to the wetlands for the opening of duck shooting season for many years.

What I saw there was nothing short of an absolute massacre of birds that went on for hours over the morning. A great number of shooters had gathered at

that wetland, and it was just a barrage of shotguns firing into every bird that was flying in the sky from 20 or 25 minutes before the official start of duck shooting season, which is at sunrise. Of course that was in the dark, which is illegal, and of course nobody is able to identify what birds they are shooting at when it is dark. But even when it became light, shooting continued relentlessly from 7.30 to around 10.00 a.m., and even after that we saw thousands of birds killed. There was little or no action taken against those shooters. I think I saw one action taken by police and authorised officers to apprehend a shooter who they were able to identify as having started shooting early, but that was the only thing I saw during that whole morning.

However, there was a lot of activity from authorised officers and police to apprehend any duck rescuers who came within 25 metres of the edge of the water or into the water, and a lot of those were apprehended and issued with infringement notices. That side of the enforcement was carried out, but there is the offence regarding hunting, taking or destroying protected wildlife under section 43(1) of the act that says:

A person must not hunt, take or destroy other protected wildlife.

It carries a penalty of 50 penalty units or six months imprisonment. We know that on Monday morning the Coalition Against Duck Shooting brought to Melbourne more than 800 birds that they had recovered from the marshes on that opening weekend. Some of these I did mention in my members statement this morning. There were 68 freckled ducks and 21 blue-billed ducks, which are threatened species; and 24 blue-winged shovelers, which were specifically outlawed from being taken this year as they are a vulnerable and protected species; 34 Eurasian coots, which are not ducks, do not look anything like ducks and are also a protected species; 25 grebes, which are also a protected species and do not look anything like a duck. They were recovered from the wetland, brought to Melbourne and displayed outside the Premier's office. Along with them were 320 teal ducks, 214 pink-eared ducks, 56 wood ducks, 33 hardhead ducks, four mountain ducks, seven black ducks, one chestnut teal, two swallows and one seagull. That is a total of 810 birds that were recovered and that had been left for dead by the hunters on the marshes. I am informed that the group of duck rescuers there were not able to recover all the ducks, and they have gone out there again in subsequent days to bring more in.

This happens every single season. Every single season protected birds are illegally shot and virtually no-one is ever charged under section 43 of the act. So in terms of the legality and legitimacy of this activity, it is not

enforced to the benefit of our protected species. Even for the so-called game species, which are only game species for three months of the year and are otherwise protected birds, hundreds of those are left by shooters on the wetlands all over Victoria every single year, and that is also an offence under the act that is not prosecuted or very rarely prosecuted. So while duck shooting, for example, may be legal under the act, the illegal activity of shooters is never prosecuted.

So I was standing there with members of the Coalition Against Duck Shooting watching as Game Management Authority officers stood by and watched as native waterbirds were shot down before them. People started shooting before the proper time — the start of the season in the dark — and nothing happened. I also have to say that in the lead-up to the opening weekend Animals Australia and the Coalition Against Duck Shooting had called for the marshes to be closed to shooting due to numerous surveys having identified freckled and blue-billed ducks being present at the wetlands. However, Minister Pulford did not use her powers — and neither did Minister D’Ambrosio — to close that wetland, and so what we saw was the inevitable: a large number of protected species killed. There is really no government department that protects the interests of our waterbirds, including the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

So in terms of legitimate activity, we do not agree that it is a legitimate activity at all and we do not agree that the laws are being enforced under the act to protect waterbirds, even if one does accept that it is legal under the act; of course the Greens would like to see that changed and a permanent ban brought in on duck shooting in Victoria. Victoria is really the only state that not only allows but promotes duck shooting season every year, and the Game Management Authority has a complete conflict of interest in apparently being the promoter of hunting and also the regulator of hunting and of course being populated by a number of hunters. It is a complete conflict of interest.

The fact that the Minister for Agriculture stood here before and outlined the amount of money that is being put into the Game Management Authority and put into supporting hunting would fill most Victorians with horror because most Victorians do not want to see duck shooting on our wetlands for three months of the year and do not want to see hunting in our state parks and national parks and on our public land at all. In fact it keeps a lot of other people in the community away from these areas when they know people are roaming around with shotguns and other firearms.

The second part of the motion says that this house:

recognises the contribution made to the economy and environment by recreational and sporting shooters in Victoria ...

We do not recognise that at all, and I have covered the issue of the environment and the destruction of our protected native waterbirds and other birds that are shot every single season. Of course if they are protected birds or birds that cannot be shot, they are by definition left on the water by shooters because they do not want to be caught if there is any type of enforcement activity going on, which there rarely is.

In terms of the economic contribution, I know Ms Pulford quoted selectively from the report entitled *Estimating the Economic Impact of Hunting in Victoria in 2013* that was prepared for the then Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI). She took some figures and facts out of that. It is quite a long report, full of repeating facts and figures but coming to no great conclusion except to say:

The total expenditure for hunting game animals was estimated to be \$282 million —

in Victoria. It is a very small number actually when you think about the fact that this is economic activity. It is not a cost-benefit analysis. The problem with these economic activity reports is that if the economic activity was not spent on hunting it would be spent on something else. But even considering that, if I could pick out some of the important parts of that report, it says that:

Forty per cent of expenditure —

for hunting —

occurred in metropolitan local government areas ...

and was not spent in the regional areas at all. It continues:

A large proportion of economic activity occurs in the Melbourne region.

Among the regions the largest impacts were in Gippsland, which the minister did say. She also mentioned the Mansfield local government area, but she did not mention that hunting accounts for 2.5 per cent of the economy there. She then skimmed over Murrindindi and Gannawarra, where, according to this report, hunting:

... makes up 1.2 per cent and 1.6 per cent of their economies respectively.

That is a very, very tiny amount, and that is economic impact. It is not a cost-benefit analysis; it is economic impact that could be spent on other things.

A further report entitled *Out for a Duck* that was released by the RSPCA found differently. It found that 87 per cent of Victorians support a ban on duck hunting and that claims that duck hunting or any other recreational hunting contributes significantly to the economy of Victoria are false. These claims assume that without hunting any related expenditure would be lost to Victoria. On the contrary, if duck hunters were prevented from hunting ducks, they would go fishing or camping or do some other activity and there would be no impact on expenditure in Victoria from a duck hunting ban.

It also found that revenue from non-hunting tourism is far more important to Victoria's economy. In fact respondents to this survey would be less likely to holiday in an area where there is duck hunting, which I mentioned before. Most Victorians are willing to pay for improvements to animal welfare and would be willing to pay to end duck hunting. The non-monetary benefits of ending duck hunting and the improvement in the welfare of the non-duck-hunting public are far greater than the non-monetary losses that hunters would incur from a ban. The RSPCA estimates the benefit from the banning of duck hunting to be around \$60 million per year.

I go back to the point that was included in the report done for DEPI in 2013 that a significant proportion of economic activity related to hunting actually occurs in Melbourne. This is something that I have observed myself over the years. Whenever I have gone to country centres such as Kerang or Donald or Sale, I have observed very little benefit to the local area. For example, at Kerang last weekend I made it my business to go around the town on the Friday evening when I arrived. There were a lot of hunters at Kerang — several hundred at least — but there was no sign of them. They were not buying takeaway, they were not eating out at the restaurants; they were just not there. That supports the point made in the report done for DEPI in 2013 that a lot of the economic activity actually occurs in Melbourne. People buy their supplies and take them with them to the camping spots and do not spend much money in the regional centres near the wetlands where the shooters congregate.

In fact in 2013 I made the point in the Parliament about being told by many people when I went to Donald that they did not support duck shooting there and they wished that it would go away because it was a hindrance to economic activity in their town. That

caused a great furore in the *Weekly Times* and I had several conversations with the secretary of the Donald Chamber of Commerce. At the end of the day she and I agreed that all I was saying was that not everyone in Donald supports duck shooting, which is true — not everyone does. In fact a survey run in the *Bendigo Advertiser* last weekend showed the majority of people in that area do not support duck shooting. There was also a report in the *Bendigo Advertiser* of 15 March that:

A band of residents and business owners from rural towns across Victoria are demanding a ban on duck hunting, a move they say would protect the animals and safeguard tourism to their regions.

Dozens of people with property and businesses backing on to popular hunting sites have joined new group Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting in the last fortnight.

Their spokesperson said:

... the members had unsuccessfully 'tried independently to get some sense out our [their] MPs, water bodies and the Game Management Authority for years' and hoped their new coalition would strengthen calls to bar waterbird hunting.

The group's case for a moratorium on hunting is an environmental and economic one. They believe bird watching would attract more tourists to rural Victoria than bird hunting and that the presence of shooters deters other visitors during the annual three-month season.

I made the point in my members statement this morning and my question without notice to the minister that under the act and the regulations people without a wildlife permit are not allowed on the water any morning from sunrise until 10.00 a.m. Those 200 wetlands are actually handed over to duck shooters and nobody else is allowed to go into the water or within 25 metres of the water. Duck shooters make up less than half a per cent of the Victorian population but they basically get unfettered or exclusive access to our wetlands for three months of the year. Most Victorians do not realise that and would be appalled.

This group wants to see peaceful, ethical, sustainable income year on year. They also say that:

'We don't see hunters coming into the town, buying cases of wine or buying trinkets in the shops ...

That is why they want to see a ban on duck shooting. I am not surprised that this group has been formed because I have seen over many years that the notion that hunting brings some sort of economic bonanza to these areas is a myth.

I turn now to the final point in Mr Bourman's motion, which is that this house:

- (3) notes that changes currently being proposed to the national firearms agreement would place unfair conditions on law-abiding firearm owners who have already proven to abide by stringent regulations that limit the use of firearms in shooting sports, recreational hunting and pest control.

Mr Bourman is asking us to note that the changes currently being proposed would place unfair conditions on law-abiding firearm owners. That is his main point. First of all, I take issue with the idea that it places unfair conditions on firearm owners. If you look at the front page of the refreshed national firearms agreement, you will see that under paragraph 4 it says the new agreement:

... will ensure that the agreement remains true to its fundamental aspects, being: the requirement for a genuine reason for possessing or using a firearm, the appropriate categorisation of firearms, the registration of firearms, firearms licensing (including fit and proper person requirements), the requirement for a permit to acquire each firearm, the safe and secure storage of firearms, the recording of firearms sales, and suitable firearms transaction practices.

I think they are all very reasonable requirements to be put on firearms holders and not unfair. If we go back to the original agreement of 1996, we see it paved the way for Australia to have world-leading gun control measures. I was listening to Mr Bourman talk about the relatively low level of gun-related crime in Australia. The reason we have a relatively low level of gun-related crime in Australia is because of the national firearms agreement.

There are quite a few changes in this new agreement. While the Greens support in principle the national firearms agreement, we do believe that it is not strong enough in the categorisation or the banning of semiautomatic weapons, particularly semiautomatic handguns, which we believe should be completely banned. But it does move ahead in terms of a nationwide registration of firearms. I saw that Mr Bourman was opposed to the registration of firearms. I am amazed that anyone could be opposed to the registration of firearms. It seems to me to be basic that firearms should be registered because that is how the police actually trace them — by having them registered.

The agreement also includes something that the Greens have called for before, which is that in terms of grounds for refusal of licences under specific reasons it includes where an applicant or a licence-holder has been the subject of an apprehended violence order, a domestic violence order, a restraining order or convicted of

assault with a weapon or aggravated assault. It puts in place minimum numbers of shooting events that someone must participate in to be eligible for a handgun licence for target shooting or pistol shooting. I will have to look at that a bit more closely, because in Victoria these were watered down back in 2013 and it is a little bit more complicated than it appears in the NFA in terms of the categorisation of guns et cetera.

Ms Pulford talked a little bit about the lever action shotgun. I am disappointed that the more than five-round lever action shotgun has been put into category D; I think that should have been banned altogether, but at least it is in the most restricted category. I would have thought that the five-round and under lever action shotgun should have been put in a higher category than category B.

There is a lot I could say about this particular motion. I think I have made some fairly apposite points as to why we cannot support Mr Bourman's motion. I also add that recent reports by Gun Control Australia under freedom of information have revealed that a record number of firearms — 6500-odd — have been stolen over the two-year period from 2014 to 2015 and that the state of Victoria has the largest number of firearms stolen.

Previous reports by the Australian Institute of Criminology have pointed to the fact that most of these firearms are stolen in rural and regional areas from homes and rural dwellings, including farms. The new NFA does make some inroads into clamping down on unsafe storage of firearms as well, because even though sporting shooters or shooting advocates say that the real problem is illegal firearms, in fact it is stolen firearms which become illegal firearms. The police have been reporting for several years now that they are finding firearms in vehicles on a routine basis, and this is of concern. So in fact we do need the national firearms agreement and we do need more stringent gun control laws in Australia.

Having said that, we will not be supporting the amendment put forward by Ms Pulford. That is not to say that we do not support the national firearms agreement in principle, even though as I have already outlined we would like to see more strict provisions in it. It is more that it does not really change the motion from our point of view — the fullness of the motion — and we often get motions in the house where you will agree with some parts and not agree with other parts. The other issue is that we do not in principle support general business motions brought forward by non-government members being amended by the government and, particularly in this case, about half an

hour before we walked in here. That left me with little time to actually discuss that with my colleagues, so we will not be supporting the amendment either.

Mr O'SULLIVAN (Northern Victoria) — I rise on behalf of The Nationals to speak to the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party motion, and I certainly look forward to making a short contribution in relation to this motion. I want to start off in relation to the economic impact of hunting in Victoria. This is a very salient point, and it is one that the coalition has been very strong on all the way through.

In the last term of government I was working for Peter Walsh — who was the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security at that time — as his chief of staff, and we took the decision that we actually wanted to find out what the actual worth of hunting in Victoria was, because we had arguments on both sides. Some were saying it was good and some were saying it was bad, so we thought, 'Let's actually find out once and for all'. So we got RM Consulting, a reputable consulting firm with a strong background in regional issues that understands these sorts of impacts on regional communities, to do that study, and that study was pretty comprehensive in its findings, with a figure of \$439 million in 2013 in terms of the contribution of hunting to Victoria's economy.

A lot of that is spent in regional Victoria and some of it is also spent in metropolitan Melbourne, but obviously hunters come from both metropolitan areas and regional areas. The coalition very clearly at that time understood the importance of hunting in Victoria and took it upon itself to put that investigation into play in terms of what that would be worth to Victoria's economy. It is not just the dollars that are significant, it is also the jobs that are created, and thousands of jobs have been created as a result of hunting in Victoria. Whether that is working in the shops that sell equipment for hunting or whether it is at the service stations from which hunters get their fuel, ice, beer or food. Whatever it is, it is spread right around the state's economy and has a big impact.

Just recently I have contributed to that economic activity, having bought my first rifle only a few months ago. So I am very pleased to say that I am now one of the firearm owners in this state. If you look at where that money has come from, it is in relation to pest animal hunting, which is about \$59 million, including the hunting of deer — and it was good to see the executive officer of the Australian Deer Association, Barry Howlett, in the gallery before; duck season is about \$43 million; and quail is at \$18 million. So it is not just in one particular area; it is spread right across

the whole lot, and that spread also means it is spread right across the whole of regional Victoria in terms of where that activity actually occurs.

The coalition also did a whole range of other things that were very important for the hunting industry. One that was probably number one on their wish list in terms of what they wanted to achieve was the implementation of the Game Management Authority, so I was very pleased to be a part of the government that was able to introduce the Game Management Authority, which has given the industry a much clearer line of sight in terms of the regulation of hunting. What you must understand about hunting is hunters are the most conservative people when it comes to wanting to look after animals and the environment so it can sustain a hunting fraternity into the future. If you ever go down to Heart Morass at Sale and see the work that has been done down there, it is absolutely amazing to see where that has come from to where it is now and what that has done in terms of conservation for the wildlife down there.

Also the coalition brought in the fox bounty — \$10 if you brought in a scalp from a fox. It is a pity that the current government scrapped that for a period of time, and it was only after 18 months of severe pressure from this side of the chamber that the government reluctantly brought back in the fox bounty. It is one of the clear ways that we are able to manage foxes out in the regions, because they do enormous damage to young stock, whether it be lambs, calves or baby goats. They do enormous damage to the economy and to those animals. Also with the wild dog bounty we introduced that at \$50 per scalp and then raised it to \$100 because we could see we were getting a real impact in terms of the impact on wild dogs and foxes. So the coalition has been very strong all the way through in terms of the contribution that we have been able to make in terms of supporting the hunting industry.

In terms of the national firearms agreement the comment I want to make in this space is that in terms of the changes that were made back in 1996 I think everyone agrees they were probably reasonable at the time and those rules have really stood the test of time some 20 years later. But any changes to the firearms agreement must involve people from the hunting community who actually understand what the implications are on the ground, because what the hunting fraternity gets very sick of is when you have public servants who make decisions in relation to these issues who do not really understand what they are talking about. They might understand the theory, but they do not understand the practice of actually undertaking these activities. So we need to ensure that

any changes that occur involve a full representation at the table from the people who actually undertake these activities and know what they are on about.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am very happy to make a small contribution to Mr Bourman's motion. He is not in the chamber — yes, he is; he is hiding over with the Greens, an interesting alliance given this motion. As mentioned in previous contributions, this motion is in three parts. The first part acknowledges the legitimate recreational pursuits of sporting shooters and hunters, and I am pleased to see that there is a consensus amongst all in this chamber in relation to the honourable pursuits of recreational shooting, hunting and fishing.

I have an interest — not a pecuniary interest, but an interest — in that I am the holder of an A and B-class firearms licence and in a previous life have been engaged in hunting on my own property and in encouraging a number of gun clubs to utilise my very small landholdings around the Birregurra area. I am very thankful for those gun clubs, given that they played a significant role in pest control on my property, mainly foxes and to a lesser extent kangaroos now — I might add, with the appropriate permits, as always, before Ms Pennicuik jumps to her feet in horror. Not only in a legitimate recreational pursuit but also in an important pest control pursuit, shooters and hunters play a role in our society, and I thank Mr Bourman for giving the house an opportunity to acknowledge the importance of those pursuits.

Paragraph (2) of the motion recognises the contribution made to the economy and environment. The previous speaker, Mr O'Sullivan, drew the same conclusion as me in relation to the study that was initiated by the then Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Peter Walsh, in relation to —

Ms Pennicuik — Rubbish.

Mr RAMSAY — What is rubbish? It is not rubbish. You can google it. It is all there in relation to the work that was carried out on the economic value of shooting and hunting in Victoria. The data indicates that in 2013 there was a benefit of over \$439 million in economic value from the legitimate pursuits of sporting shooting and hunting, something the Greens would never be able to achieve in their pursuits, whatever they might be, and with their priorities. That was the value in 2013. I can only imagine what economic value is being contributed to the Victorian economy in 2016 by those engaged in those pursuits.

I noticed that Mr O'Sullivan also mentioned the work that the coalition government did in relation to fox control and wild dog control when we were in government. It is true that many of our shooters and hunters who were helping with pest control were very minimally rewarded with the opportunity to be able to cash in fox scalps or fox tails, depending what the program was at the time. They were able to recoup some of the cost of the ammunition and be rewarded for the effort that goes into some of those collective gun clubs that use their weekends to help landholders, farmers like me, in reducing pests and invasive animals that are causing considerable economic damage to our farming businesses. They play a significant role in pest control as well as obviously enjoying the sports of shooting and hunting.

Mr O'Sullivan also talked about wild dogs. It is interesting to note that the government has flip-flopped on this issue for the whole two years of its current reign about the best strategy to manage wild populations, particularly on our interface properties, both private and public. One minute they were refusing to aerial bait, and the next minute they took off the bounty — and then they put it back on, as they did with the foxes, realising in the case of wild dogs and the impact they were having that there is value in having a concerted preventative approach to control using both the bounty and aerial baiting. They both played a significant role in working together to try and reduce the impact of wild dogs and foxes while the government flip-flopped over the strategy and method for controlling those pests. It is interesting to see that they have almost reverted back to the coalition's policies in the previous government. We see a lot of flip-flopping with this government, and no doubt they will always trend back to whatever policies worked in the past. I have to congratulate the coalition government on its policies in relation to pest control that obviously this government has seen fit to copy in its term.

In relation to the national firearms agreement — and I do appreciate that we are not opposing this motion — I am extremely supportive of what John Howard did in relation to Port Arthur and the way the government responded at the time with the firearms amnesty and the initiation of a national firearms agreement where certain categories of firearms were banned. The owners of those firearms had the luxury of being able to surrender their firearms through the amnesty period, and I think this got a lot of firearms out of the system that were either not being used or were overcalibrated, whether it be for sport or for hunting. I hope that will continue to be the case.

While we are not opposing the motion as a whole, I certainly hope that common sense will prevail and guns will be available to those who are appropriately licensed and registered to continue the sport of shooting and continue hunting, both in a sports sense and in a pest control sense, with the appropriate firearms that do not impact community safety. I am sure there will be appropriate balances through that agreement.

I would also like to take note of the work that was done in relation to the formation of the Game Management Authority. Mr O'Sullivan has referred to this. Mr Peter Walsh in the Legislative Assembly, as the minister at the time, initiated the Game Management Authority. A current inquiry that the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee is conducting involves investigating the role the Game Management Authority is playing in responding to invasive pests and in particular the significant escalation in the number of sambar deer and the impact it is having, particularly in the northern areas.

The Game Management Authority's role is to collect data and record the current number of invasive species and also to implement appropriate control methods with the assistance of the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia and Field and Game Australia. Those wonderful sporting groups are combining and collectively getting their members to help us respond to what is becoming a really significant problem, particularly in the north but not only in the north. Wild deer are also starting to permeate through the southern areas of the state.

It is good to see that the Game Management Authority is using a huge number of unpaid volunteer hours, at a significant reduction in cost, through the membership of the shooters association and Field and Game to respond to this increase in the numbers of invasive pests. Not only are these pests having a significant impact on the productivity of our farmlands and causing destruction of our crown reserves but they are also having an impact on the community. Some of these animals are actually getting into suburbia and creating significant mischief for the community.

All in all, I congratulate Mr Bourman for bringing this motion to the house. As I said, the opposition is not opposing it. It does give us an opportunity to acknowledge the legitimate pursuits of both sporting shooters and hunters — the role they play and the economic value they provide. I also note the part of the motion that relates to the national firearms agreement.

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) — I am conscious of time, so I will get down to this pretty quickly. The main thing is that it is good to get support from the coalition, and the government is two-thirds supportive. I do not normally comment on the Greens' contributions, but I will say one thing: this motion is not about the abolition of the national firearms agreement; it is about any new restrictions. It is more about saying that we have had enough. You are squeezing blood out of a stone. On that note, I will wind it up.

Amendment negated.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 18

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

Noes, 20

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

Pairs

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| Davis, Mr | Eideh, Mr |
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Motion negated.

MEMBER ENTITLEMENTS

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house:

- (1) takes note of the matters surrounding the Audit Committee on second residence allowance pursuant to the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation (Allowance) Regulations 2013;
- (2) calls on the government to immediately amend those regulations to provide that in addition to existing requirements, members claiming a second residence allowance must have their home base within the electorate they represent; and

- (3) calls on the government to amend the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 to require claims for the second residence allowance to be disclosed annually in the register of interests.

I note that since notice of this motion was given the President has announced that the report of the audit undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers on behalf of the Department of Parliamentary Services will be tabled tomorrow, and I see that as absolutely critical to us moving forward and addressing the sorry state of rotting and defrauding of the Victorian Parliament by the members for Tarneit and Melton in the Legislative Assembly, addressing the culture of rotting and putting in place some measures which are going to make it more difficult for people to rot the system not only at the expense of taxpayers — the public — but also at the expense of the reputation of the Victorian Parliament and, dare I say, at the expense of themselves as members of Parliament.

It is very sad. I would like to put on the record that I have enjoyed a very good relationship with the member for Tarneit. We have shared many functions and events through our activity in multicultural communities. But I am disappointed to have learned of the nature of the rotting and defrauding of the second residence allowance, which this Parliament provides for the benefit of members who live in rural and regional Victoria. That has always been the understanding — that it is exclusively for members who live in rural and regional Victoria and who have to spend time staying in Melbourne when Parliament sits or when there is other parliamentary work. The rotting we have seen, where members who are essentially metropolitan residents have set up residences in country or regional Victoria in order to be able to access an allowance that was not intended for them, is nothing short of corruption, in my view.

This motion is intended, as I said, to first of all provide an opportunity to document the events which have seen this sorry state of rotting and defrauding emerge surrounding the members for Melton and Tarneit, who do need to be held to account for their actions not only as members of Parliament but also as senior office-bearers of this Parliament — Speaker and Deputy Speaker — who were responsible for upholding those rules and holding everyone else to account. That in my view not only shows them to be in dereliction of their duties but escalates their offences given their senior office-bearing positions.

The standards which apply to their once-held high offices and the duties which are required in those positions means that it is even more important that the proposed changes we are putting forward in

paragraphs (2) and (3) of this motion are implemented. Paragraph (2) of the motion relates to the second residence allowance regulations, which we are seeking to have changed to clarify once and for all that members of Parliament should be resident in the electorates they seek or purport to represent.

I note that there is quite a long list of people who do not live in the electorates they represent. They include, and I am just working down the list, Mr Nardella, who purports to represent the electorate of Melton and who has given his residence as Ocean Grove. Everyone who knows Mr Nardella also knows that he spends a lot of time at Beach Road, Mordialloc.

Mr Ondarchie — What's there?

Mrs PEULICH — I will not go into the personal details of the member; he is entitled to that. But he has been seen on a regular basis in Mordialloc.

Mr Languiller, the former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and member for Tarneit, purported to live in Queenscliff, but we know from the evidence in the letter read out by the President yesterday that this residence has never been taken up, and I will come back to the detail of that.

In the Legislative Assembly Mr Donnellan, who represents Narre Warren North, lives in Fitzroy North; Ms Graley, who represents Narre Warren South, lives in Mount Martha, Mornington; Ms D'Ambrosio, who represents Mill Park, lives in Brunswick; Mr McGuire, who represents Broadmeadows, lives in Fitzroy; and Ms Halfpenny, who represents Thomastown, lives in Preston. Mr Pakula is a little closer to home: he represents the Assembly electorate in which I live, Keysborough, and lives in Black Rock.

Also in the Legislative Assembly, Mr Pallas represents Werribee but lives in Williamstown; Ms Hennessy, who represents Altona, lives in West Footscray; Ms Edwards, who represents Bendigo West, lives in Longlea and Axedale; Mr Howard represents Buninyong but lives in Alfredton; Mr Wynne represents Richmond but lives in North Melbourne; Mr Edbrooke represents Frankston but lives in Mount Eliza; Mr Carroll represents Niddrie but lives in Moonee Ponds; Mr Foley represents Albert Park but lives in Elwood; Mr Perera represents Cranbourne but lives in Sandhurst; Ms Hutchins represents Sydenham but lives in Keilor; and Ms Neville represents Bellarine but lives in Geelong West.

In this chamber Mr Mulino represents Eastern Victoria Region but lives in Northcote and Mr Jennings represents South Eastern Metropolitan Region but lives

in St Kilda, which is nowhere near the electorate he and I represent.

I have always lived in the electorates I have represented, and indeed it is a rule in my party that members of Parliament must live in the electorates which they represent. I think we must amend the regulations with the addition to the existing requirements that members claiming a second residence allowance must have their home base within the electorate they represent. This will not only make it more accountable but also, I believe, provide for stronger representation of those constituencies that elect these members.

One further way of doing that is by actually recording on the ballot paper the suburb in which a candidate or member of Parliament seeking re-election is registered or lives. This is, as I said before, to prevent the home base of MPs claiming the allowance being located outside of their respective electorates. This is intended to be an allowance for rural and regional MPs, not for city-based MPs who, driven by self-interest, establish a residence, often in name only, in order to tap into the public purse and rort an allowance that is not designed for them. The change that is required to the second residence allowance rules — namely, that the home base be within the electorate where the member was elected — would also be what electors would expect and welcome.

Paragraph (3) of the motion seeks to enable Parliament to take action against rorters of the second residence allowance and to strengthen the accountability of MPs. This means amending the code of conduct which applies to MPs under the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 and requiring these allowance particulars to be included in the register of interests. Actionable penalties, imposed by the Parliament, apply if there is a failure to comply with section 9 of the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978. This is about accountability and transparency. This Parliament has a duty to act to ensure that such rorting cannot and does not occur.

There is no reason MPs should be allowed to derive a financial benefit by simply gaming the system. It seems that both of these members have simply been gaming the system. The definition of rorting is gaming the system and manipulating the rules in order to access a benefit. Indeed I think this is more than just a rort. On the basis of the draft audit report it appears there is also fraud involved and that further action is required in order to address that.

Quite simply, if there is fraud, these members of Parliament need to be booted out. I am not sure what the machinery is, but clearly the Premier must set the tone. He was the one who prosecuted the case against the former member for Frankston in the Assembly for a much, much smaller amount of money than anything these two members have accessed. The now Premier prosecuted that day in, day out. He called him a rorter. He called for him to be expelled from the Parliament every day he sat and indeed often said — I cannot exactly recall the quote, but it is something like — ‘The standard you walk by is the standard you live by’.

Indeed if the Premier takes no action to address these two very serious cases of rorting, that is a reflection on him and his government. Dare I say this culture of rorting seems to be transcendent; this is just another example of rorting. We saw the red shirt rorts, where electorate office budgets were rorted when electorate officers were hired to fulfil political campaigning activity. We saw \$10 million given to Trades Hall for the upgrade and refurbishment of its building. Can you imagine what would happen if any other political party made such a gift to their own benefactors? We have seen cosy deals with politically friendly unions, in particular the firefighters union, who have been putting their hand out wanting their legal fees to be picked up by the government.

All of these are examples of a rorting culture, and indeed this Premier will become known as the Premier for rorting. This is not just a case of exploiting the Victorian taxpayer for personal gain. There are far more serious acts of deception, going on the initial and media reports, by both the member for Melton and the member for Tarneit, including contradictory press statements and evidence which was prevented to the Audit Committee which indicates a level of deceptive conduct.

In addition to this the immediate penalties must be strengthened — aside from any integrity measures relating to corruption in the conduct of MPs — which is the purpose of paragraph (3) of this motion. Requiring these allowance particulars to be included in the register of interests will mean that actionable penalties from the Parliament will apply if there is a failure to comply with section 9 of the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978.

In addition to this the code of conduct which applies under this act will become more enforceable where rorting of the second residence allowance has occurred, given members are required to not — and I am quoting from section 3(1)(a)(ii) — ‘bring discredit upon the

Parliament' and are subject to section 3(1)(e), which says:

... a Member who is a Minister shall ensure that no conflict exists, or appears to exist, between his public duty and his private interests ...

I consider the Presiding Officers and their deputies to indeed be equivalent to ministers of the Crown; therefore there is a clear public duty that is bestowed upon them in their roles.

Indeed siphoning off funds for personal benefit is in clear breach of the code of conduct that applies to members of Parliament. Daniel Andrews and Labor may think it is okay to rip off or defraud Victorian taxpayers, but the public does not and we certainly do not. We will hold the government to account for what has become a sickening example of fraudulent behaviour, rorting, lying and cheating the Victorian taxpayer.

In addition to the serious findings of the Audit Committee, the exploitation of the second residence allowance by the former Speaker and Deputy Speaker breaches the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation (Allowances) Regulations 2013. One, according to the President's account of the Audit Committee report, both the member for Melton and the member for Tarneit improperly claimed the second residence allowance. Two, Mr Languiller failed to inform the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of his change in circumstances yet continued to claim the second residence allowance. In this particular document — that is, the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation (Allowances) Regulations 2013 — there is an onus to inform the Parliament within 30 days of a change to those circumstances, so notwithstanding the fact that documentation may only be required to periodically be signed, there is an explicit responsibility in this particular regulation to inform the Parliament within 30 days. Clearly this has not occurred.

Mr Nardella, it appears, has acted in a fraudulent manner with respect to his rorting of the second residence allowance as well. Both have rorted the system by claiming their home base falls outside of the 80-kilometre radius from the centre of Melbourne. Both have their home base outside of their electorate in what can only be described as an effort to obtain personal gain to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. They have benefited more from rorting this allowance than many families earn in a single year. Especially given their well-remunerated positions and the increments for their higher duties, it is absolutely shameful.

I have heard more than one Labor member of Parliament say they should just resign. It tarnishes everyone, but most of all it tarnishes the Labor Party and the Premier. It would certainly never cross my mind to go to such lengths — to be so creative — in attempting to derive a personal benefit, financial or otherwise, as the member for Tarneit and the member for Melton have. Clearly they cannot be trusted with public funds. Their actions have brought the government and the Parliament into disrepute. Their actions may constitute criminal behaviour.

Even though I note that the Leader of the Opposition has called for police to investigate this, I believe that this should be an absolute last resort. It is crystal clear by admission and by failure to provide evidence to the contrary that these two members have been involved in very elaborate schemes to defraud the system. They should resign, and not only from the Labor Party, as Don Nardella has. They should be asked to leave the Parliament, and there ought to be a by-election called for both of those seats as soon as possible so the good burghers of Tarneit and Melton have an opportunity to elect new members of Parliament who will represent them with dignity and integrity.

The Audit Committee has highlighted the acts of apparent fraud committed by the member for Melton. It has also highlighted actions which could constitute fraud committed by the member for Tarneit. The ongoing acts of exploitation of taxpayers by this government and the said members need to be prevented, first of all by passing this motion in this house, as they were the ones who chose to rip off Victorian taxpayers without a second thought. The only reason why Mr Languiller subsequently repaid the defrauded amount is that he has been caught out, and there are certainly question marks about the admissions by Mr Languiller about when he notified Parliament of his changed circumstances. I believe that one set of information has been provided in Parliament and another out in the public domain, which basically means that the member for Tarneit has in effect also misled Parliament.

The evidence provided by the members involved does not stack up by any standard of integrity in terms of the code of conduct, ministerial or otherwise. The inclusion of the second residence allowance on the register of interests, which increases the level of accountability and the immediate penalties which apply to those who do the wrong thing, as in the case of the members for Melton and Tarneit, is also necessary. I hope that the house will support this.

Mr Andrews has certainly taken a very, very different stance to the high standards that he set for the former Minister for Small Business, Industry and Trade, Mr Adem Somyurek, whose investigation was part of a WorkCover claim with much higher confidentiality provisions. All of that information was obviously released. The Premier upheld a very, very high standard. He was certainly prepared to throw Mr Somyurek under the bus, yet in relation to Mr Languiller and Mr Nardella the Premier has said, and I quote:

I've made my views very clear about the community's expectations. I don't intend to ask members to pay back money unless I think they should.

That is a very, very weak standard. Basically, is it a fact that Mr Nardella and Mr Languiller are being treated more leniently because they are either factional allies or supportive of the Premier's own faction, while Mr Somyurek may be in an opposing faction? I suspect that most members of the Labor Party believe that that is the case.

The actions of the member for Tarneit and the member for Melton are indicative, as I said, of a culture of rorting in the Andrews Labor government, very different to the high standards that Mr Andrews, as Leader of the Opposition, set for all members of Parliament, including the former Assembly member for Frankston, and the overtures and promises he gave to Victorians in the lead-up to the 2014 state election. But what he is now running is basically a protection racket for those who are in favour or factionally aligned, as with the members for Tarneit and Melton. Mr Adem Somyurek was thrown to the wolves because he was not in favour, whereas in actual fact these members gain all the protections of Daniel Andrews despite the obvious defrauding activity.

The Victorian opposition welcomes the investigation. Mr Guy as Leader of the Opposition has been at the forefront of trying to force this government to take some action. The Victorian opposition welcomes the most recent investigation by the Audit Committee — a step forward in dealing with this ongoing culture of rorting in the Daniel Andrews Labor government. Of course this continues with what we have seen with using public funds to mount challenges in the courts and trying to block the Ombudsman from inquiring into the rorting by Labor, driven by Labor's hierarchy and involving the red army of political operatives.

The findings of this draft audit are damning to those involved in this scandalous rip-off of the Victorian taxpayer, and I think it is a scandalous reflection on the lack of integrity of this government and the Premier

who leads it, who has obviously presided over and protected this culture of rorting. The Daniel Andrews Labor government's protection racket gives cover to those who choose to defraud the taxpayer and rip off the Parliament and the people of Victoria. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were misused — taxpayer dollars — abusing the positions of power which the Victorian people have bestowed upon them and upon all of us.

The level of activity in fraudulently receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in allowances without an entitlement to do so is absolutely reprehensible. Deriving personal benefit and private financial gain through rorting of allowances has shown that Daniel Andrews and Labor lack integrity when it comes to the management of public funds. The apparent act of fraud committed by the member for Melton explains why he has been forced to resign from the parliamentary Labor Party and as Deputy Speaker. His actions are toxic to the reputation of the Daniel Andrews Labor government, which is already in tatters, and toxic to this Parliament, and Mr Nardella and Daniel Andrews must both be held to account.

The Audit Committee findings are damning to the crossbencher, indicating that he may have committed an act of fraud against the Parliament and the Victorian taxpayer. The former Speaker, Mr Languiller, has even come out saying that the rules should be changed to prevent such rorting. Of course this is after the fact of being found out ripping off the Victorian taxpayer. It would have continued, we imagine, if no-one had become aware of this. The sickening culture of rorting, fraud and septic conduct coupled with Daniel Andrews's protection racket has shaken, I believe, this government to its rotten core.

I believe these actions by the members for Tarneit and Melton may well constitute fraud. In the case of the member for Melton, the Audit Committee's report indicates that each of these members of Parliament derived a personal gain, a financial gain, and may have entered into acts of deception to defraud the Victorian taxpayer. These are conclusions in the Audit Committee's report into the second residence allowance scandal, which points to this in the case of the member for Melton — that only forensic investigation will determine the extent of the rorting. However, the findings are damning of Mr Nardella in particular, and there has been a self-admission of guilt by Mr Languiller. The report from the Audit Committee indicates very clearly in the case of the member for Melton that his evidence is unreliable at best, which I believe is likely to constitute deceptive behaviour involving family members who have conveniently

refused to comment on the evidence provided by the member for Melton. These are the conclusions drawn by the Audit Committee report.

Just to recap, the member for Tarneit, Mr Languiller, who has agreed to pay back more than \$37 000, claims to live in Queenscliff, 103 kilometres from Melbourne, and represents Tarneit, which is less than 30 kilometres from the CBD, but it appears that indeed he has never resided at Queenscliff. In a statement to Parliament on 23 February 2017 the then Speaker, Mr Languiller, stated:

In changing my principal place of residence I fully accept that my claims for allowances, whilst within the rules, do not meet community expectations.

I do not believe they indeed meet the rules.

Mr Languiller, in making this statement, appears to have also misled the Parliament. He has admitted that for an extended period of time he did not live at the Queenscliff residence despite claiming the allowance. As the Presiding Officer he knew the rules. He broke the rules. He failed to report to the Clerk changes in his circumstances in relation to the second residence allowance, and that should leave us in no doubt. This is confirmed by the Audit Committee review of claims made by Mr Languiller. Only when Mr Languiller was caught out did he repay the money. I understand that Mr Languiller may have some personal challenges, both financial and in terms of his family life — we all do, many people do — but we do not resort to these types of actions in order to extricate ourselves out of personal difficulties.

Mr Languiller has clearly defrauded the system; I do not believe there is any dispute there. He needs to resign, and we need to go to a by-election in the seat of Tarneit. According to the Parliament's Audit Committee, 13 February 2017 was when Mr Languiller notified the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly that he would no longer receive the \$37 678 per year second residence allowance. So there you go, on 23 February 2017 his spokeswoman said, and I quote, 'His entitlement ended in November 2016'. That was in a media report in the *Age* dated 23 February 2017. So there is a discrepancy there, and clearly that means Mr Languiller, who made the statement in Parliament, has therefore misled Parliament.

Mr Languiller claimed something to which he was not entitled. He has been deceptive in his comments, amounting to actions which could only constitute findings of fraud against him. The elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly is on the increased salary of \$244 547 — that is nearly a quarter of a million dollars — plus \$17 785 in expense allowances. That is

a lot of money; that is more money than most families would see in many years. The value of the second residence allowance was \$37 678, which nudges it up to \$300 000. If you cannot extricate yourself out of financial difficulty with that sort of money coming into your bank account, then you indeed have problems.

The question is: how can we have confidence in the evidence given by Mr Languiller to the Audit Committee in relation to his defrauding of the system and systematic ripping off of the Victorian taxpayer, given that he has clearly misled Parliament, stating he was within the rules when he has, on the findings of the Audit Committee and advice received, not adhered to the rules? Mr Languiller needs to be held to account for his rorting and for his defrauding of the system.

The government are rotten to the core, and the only way that they can try to redeem themselves is by forcing these two members out of Parliament and moving to a by-election. Otherwise the government will continue to haemorrhage. Politically that may be an opportunity for members of the opposition. We will be talking about this each and every sitting day, reminding Victorians of the hypocrisy, of the duplicity and of the fraud of not only those members but all that the Premier has stood for and failed to uphold. The only way that he can stem that haemorrhaging is by clearing out the rorters and indeed moving to a by-election.

The Audit Committee report summarised by the President yesterday states that Mr Languiller intended to live in Queenscliff yet did not. It is damning to Mr Languiller's personal statement from the chair that he was within the rules. There have been conflicting comments in relation to Mr Languiller from both the office of the Premier and Mr Languiller. The *Age* of 23 February reported that the Premier's office said Mr Languiller's primary residence was in Queenscliff. The same article reported that Mr Languiller's spokeswoman said his primary residence was in Footscray. He clearly broke the rules, defrauded the Parliament and the taxpayer and coughed up when he was caught out.

The Premier and Mr Languiller cannot even get their stories right. Mr Languiller was not entitled to claim the allowance, having paid back \$37 000, and there have been a series of deceptive comments in the media relating to this second residence allowance claim. However, Mr Languiller has agreed to pay back the \$37 000 and Mr Nardella has not. Despite the shonky, threadbare, deceptive and evasive screen Mr Nardella has set up to protect his backside, he refuses to admit fault and refuses to pay back the money.

In summarising Mr Languiller's case, the Audit Committee report, summarised yesterday by the President, states:

... the member had not notified the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly when it became apparent that the intention to live in Queenscliff as a principal place of residence was no longer a reality.

The findings indicate that he should not have been claiming the second residence allowance, as supported by the evidence of utility bills indicating minimal usage, driver logs — and the word amongst the drivers is that no-one remembers actually taking him to Queenscliff — fringe benefits and tax declarations. These findings are damning for this government and the member for Tarneit. His circumstances have changed. There is no excuse for rotting of the second residence allowance. He himself has stated quite frankly that there is always a way around rules. He has found it, because he was actually charged with the responsibility of upholding them. The former Speaker knew of the way around the rules, exploited it and exploited the Victorian taxpayer for private gain.

I will not go through the series of facts, which again have been well canvassed, but I will move to the circumstances surrounding the former Deputy Speaker, the member for Melton. If you actually search *Hansard*, the member for Melton has built a reputation on maligning and attacking members of the public and other people in Parliament as a platform to accuse them often maliciously and without foundation of all sorts of misdemeanours and corruption. The irony of it is that this man has been corrupt for a very, very long time. This man who lives in a glass house was throwing a lot of stones, and all this time he has been an absolute hypocrite.

He claimed the second residence allowance, he has resigned as the Deputy Speaker, he has resigned from the committees and he has resigned from the parliamentary Labor Party; however, anyone who moves around Parliament will see Mr Nardella having morning tea, afternoon tea, lunch and drinks with his parliamentary Labor colleagues, so clearly he is not being shunned. This is an endorsement and support of Mr Nardella despite all that he is done. But he has got the audacity of refusing to pay back the money that he has pinched. What was reported in this chamber in relation to the member for Melton was that:

The location of the 'home base' appeared to have no long-term connection with the member and it is difficult to argue convincingly that he intended this to be a long-term/permanent principal residence.

There is no long-term connection to any person, and this should be of interest to the Special Minister of State in particular, who is responsible for the integrity regimes, because this conclusion drawn by the Parliament's Audit Committee suggests that fraud has been committed by the member for Melton.

According to a report today in the ABC news Mr Nardella likely claimed a total of \$175 000 of extra benefits. The *Herald Sun* puts the figure at approximately \$200 000. Let us split the difference; it is a lot of dough. For many families that may be four times the amount they earn in a year, especially those on lower incomes. However, the cost to Mr Nardella according to the committee was 200 bucks a fortnight. That is \$100 a week. Not a bad return if you can get it. That is a net profit of something like \$32 000 a year.

Mr Barber — The rest went to his family.

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, the rest went to his family, absolutely. All this by simply defrauding and signing some documents and sticking to a lie. This was a very lucrative outcome for Mr Nardella. It is not just a rort; it is actually fraud against the Victorian taxpayer.

The full report from the Audit Committee is going to be tabled tomorrow. We look forward to reading it. Should the Premier not take any action — and he must if he is going to salvage what little of his own reputation remains — this matter must be referred to Victoria Police to investigate this act of fraud committed by the disgraced member for Melton, Don Nardella. The particulars leading up to Mr Nardella's fraudulent rip-off of the Victorian taxpayer include, according to Mr Nardella, leaving his home base in Lake Wendouere in April 2014 following the breakdown of his personal relationship. On 24 April he notified that his home base had changed to Ocean Grove. This was his claim for deriving a second residence allowance to which he was not entitled, as there were no driver logs or records to support his claim for the allowance.

There are claims he did not use a parliamentary vehicle to go there. Well, that is interesting. All members of Parliament have a parliamentary vehicle or a benefit that can be used in lieu of claiming a parliamentary vehicle to purchase a vehicle for that purpose. Nonetheless it is the public purse that pays for it. He also claims he made payments of \$200 per fortnight to use the address in Ocean Grove. He claimed that utility costs are incorporated into the \$200 a fortnight. So he paid everything with \$200 a fortnight, including utility costs. My utility costs would be substantially greater in simply one week.

In addition to that I understand that Mr Nardella's relocatable home, which he had declared earlier in a members register of interests, may have been something like a caravan. I am not sure whether these rules of a second residence allowance apply to a caravan or maybe a lean-to or maybe a tent. Anyone interested in roting the public purse: buy yourself a bit of very cheap land and put up a tent. It does not matter which constituency you represent. According to the standards of Mr Nardella and the Premier of Victoria you would comply, and they are the grounds on which he is refusing to pay back this money. However, the Audit Committee report states that:

The member stated that there are no driver records to support his frequency of stay as he did not use a vehicle provided by Parliament.

I do not believe that for one minute. As I said before, we actually get to see Mr Nardella a lot in Beach Road, Mordialloc — a lot — so I am not even sure whether this story stacks up in terms of the truth.

Mr Leane — Are you some kind of private eye or something?

Mrs PEULICH — No, I am not a private eye. I have an extensive network of members of the community who of course will notice a member of Parliament moving around their community, just as, for example, they observed Mr Herbert dining frequently in Parkdale with his parliamentary vehicle and his chauffeur waiting outside even though it was only a few minutes travel to the house where he was staying. So indeed this just does not stack up. It smells, and it smells to high heaven.

Mr Nardella made payments of \$200 per fortnight to use the address in Ocean Grove. The member claims utility costs were incorporated into the \$200, but he has not entered into a lease agreement with the landlord, who was family. Now how cosy is that? The member stated that there were no driver records and indeed that he did not use a vehicle provided by Parliament. I am not sure exactly how he got there, but given his dire financial position I am not sure that he would have been catching the train.

The Audit Committee's key finding for the member for Melton according to the President yesterday, and I quote, is that:

The location of the 'home base' appeared to have no long-term connection with the member and it is difficult to argue convincingly that he intended this to be a long-term/permanent principal residence.

Further on the President stated:

The Audit Committee agreed that, viewed in terms of a reasonable person test, a position could be taken that the arrangement in this period with the member's family may have been entered into to ensure that the member would continue to receive the second residence allowance. The member notified that the 'landlord'-family members did not wish to discuss the arrangements entered into with the member.

Well of course, because he would be implicating them in the big cover-up and a big lie. The President said further:

The Audit Committee considered that, from a reputation risk perspective for Parliament, the arrangement may be construed as non-prudent, non-arms length, potentially non-commercial (low 'rent'), and arguably opportunistic, designed to ensure continued enjoyment of the second residence allowance.

I can think of many more colourful words to explain that arrangement: quite smelly, corrupt, on the nose and a rort. He also said:

The Audit Committee noted that the member had advised PwC that he has recently moved out of the 'home base' at Ocean Grove.

Again, how convenient.

The President informed the house yesterday of the Audit Committee's findings and gave a summary, and we look forward to the tabling of the full report tomorrow. But in conclusion can I say this government's track record of roting has got to end here. One way of attempting to remedy a trashed reputation has got to be to call the members for Tarneit and Melton to account and to force them to leave Parliament and to repay the money — even if it means, if Mr Nardella refuses to pay money he thought he should be given, making sure that we claim that from his parliamentary superannuation. The taxpayer should not have to wear this rort, and by-elections should be held.

In addition to that there are a range of other rorts that this Premier has presided over. It is a protection racket. It is time to end it. The way to start the new chapter is to call these two members to account, see them leave Parliament — just as the Premier demanded the former member for Frankston in the Assembly be thrown out of Parliament — and clear out the roting, of which we will continue to remind him each and every day of this Parliament's life as long as these two members continue to sit here.

With those few words, I commend the motion to the house. Obviously the discussion of the facts has been extensive, but I think also we need to make sure that

members of Parliament do live within their own electorates. The Liberal Party has been very strong on that, and our preselection rules reflect that. Most members of Parliament on the Labor side of politics represent areas that are very distant from where they live. That might be because those suburbs perhaps do not provide them with the standard of living that they may be accustomed to on the public purse, but we believe that it would actually enhance the quality of representation. Also, we believe that the disclosure of the second residence allowance needs to be made annually in the register of interests. These are just some basic steps that need to be taken, but the most important one is that these two members of Parliament need to leave and they need to leave as soon as possible.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The government is in no position to support Mrs Peulich's motion considering that the Audit Committee report is going to be tabled tomorrow. It is obviously pre-emptive of Mrs Peulich to move this motion today, but I think the reason she has moved this motion is to be able to cast aspersions on people outside of the two MPs who we will be commenting on from tomorrow's audit report, and that is what Mrs Peulich does.

What Mrs Peulich does do well, I have noticed, is that she is very good at clearing a room. Up until Ms Fitzherbert turned up not long ago — and I do not think she was particularly keen to be here — Mrs Peulich had cleared out all of them. On general business day she managed to clear out all her colleagues. I would have thought if it was such an important motion, some of them might have hung around —

Mrs Peulich — They'll be here to vote for it. Don't you worry about that. And they'll be watching to see how you guys vote.

Mr LEANE — They might be here to vote, but they are not here for you, Mrs Peulich.

Mrs Peulich — Are you going to defend the rorters? Do you stand by the rorters?

Mr LEANE — They might vote for the motion, but they are not here for you. In answer to your question, Mrs Peulich, I do not defend rorters. There will be a report tomorrow and the report will be acted on. As far as the entitlement that this report is centred around is concerned, the Special Minister of State is working on tightening these rules so there are no anomalies. The minister will make that announcement after everyone who has been claiming a residential allowance has been audited — every single member of the Parliament, no

matter if they are from the ALP, the Liberal Party or The Nationals. Every MP will be audited, and then the Special Minister of State will respond and the rules will be tightened. We do not want to be voting for a motion that limits what can be done in this area to restore the confidence of those who vote us into the Parliament.

Mrs Peulich uses these motions to throw dirt at everyone she can and to talk about how she knows someone who saw someone park somewhere. She knows someone who saw someone park somewhere — a good bit of detective work there, Sherlock Holmes. I do not know what that proves, but we can all throw out rumours.

Before this issue became a big issue there was a lot of discussion in the ranks — and I have got to say to Mrs Peulich that some of it came from her side. At least one country Liberal MP says she lives in her regional electorate, but her children go to a metropolitan school. That is a long drop-off to school, is it not, by someone who lives about 3 hours away from the school that their children attend? You would be saying, 'Kids, you need to get up at 3.00 a.m., have your cornflakes, put on your uniforms and jump in the car' — actually there might be a bus that travels from the region to that particular school. You would spend 3 hours in the car and then do the same thing on the way back. 'We'll see you back home at about 10 o'clock, darling; we'll see you then. Have a great long day'. We can all throw out that sort of stuff. It is easy, Mrs Peulich. We can all do that, and it is something that has been going around for a long time. It will be interesting to see how it comes out.

Mrs Peulich throws around all this dirt, brings up the red army and talks about ALP electorate officers (EOs). Last week there was a compulsory two-day conference for Liberal Party electorate officers. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Guy, told all Liberal Party electorate officers to turn up to a compulsory two-day conference about campaigning.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, if the member wished to corroborate the activities of the conference, he would note that there were a number of parliamentary officers presenting on important elements of the operations of this Parliament. Indeed he is absolutely wrong in his claims.

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

Mr Barber — It is not against the standing orders to be wrong.

Mr LEANE — I refuse to accept that I am wrong. I one hundred per cent refuse to accept that I am wrong, because Liberal electorate officers were told by Matthew Guy to compulsorily turn up to a conference on campaigning to try to catch up with the Labor Party, so two days of EOs wages were fraudulently paid for by the taxpayer. If you take the holier-than-thou approach that the Liberals have taken, that is in breach of their — —

Mr Jennings — Magna carta.

Mr LEANE — It is in breach of everything. It is in breach of their workplace description. I would be asking how many EOs there are and times that by two days. Liberal Party MPs should pay that back. If they do not pay that back, they should leave the Parliament. They should resign from the Parliament because they have fraudulently done a number on the taxpayers of Victoria. Pay back the money or resign, Mrs Peulich.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr LEANE — I have just described the fraud that you inflicted on the Victorian taxpayers last week, and I insist that you either pay back that money or resign — and I am genuine about that.

Mrs Peulich — You are about as genuine as a \$3 bill.

Mr LEANE — I am genuine about that. This is just another motion that is not very popular amongst her own party colleagues; she managed to clear them all out of the benches. It is just another one where she can — —

Mr Jennings interjected.

Mr LEANE — Mr Jennings, there was no-one there for most of her contribution. It is just another chance for the member to get up and throw all sorts of falsehoods around about members who have not even been investigated in the report that will be handed down tomorrow. Just be patient, Mrs Peulich. Wait for the report. You will be all right.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr LEANE — As I just said, I do not defend anyone who has rorted the system. There is a process going forward now; there will be a report delivered tomorrow. Once the Audit Committee has audited everyone who has been claiming this allowance the Special Minister of State will respond on how we will tighten it up so there will be no vagueness about any sort of allowance. Every allowance will be looked into,

and then I am sure Mrs Peulich will be able to make up another fishing motion. She will get up and will tell the chamber that she knows someone who saw someone park somewhere. She will channel Sherlock Holmes again. She will channel Petrocelli with the damning evidence that she knows someone who saw someone who parked somewhere. That is a damning indictment of us all.

She knows someone who saw someone who parked somewhere. The amendments to the evidence on the ALP are getting better. Is the member of the ALP the someone who saw someone, or is the member of the ALP the someone who someone saw, or is the member of the ALP the someone who lived in the street where you saw the someone who parked in the street?

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr LEANE — I think we are getting somewhere now. I have said enough. Mr Barber wants to speak on the motion, so I will leave it there. But I reiterate that this is all pre-emptive rubbish. A report will be tabled tomorrow, and people will be dealt with in a fair and proper fashion.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — Unlike Mr Leane I do not believe this is pre-emptive at all. In fact I think it is way, way overdue that we start talking in this chamber about how we reform the structures and the accountabilities around parliamentary allowances.

I will refer just to a bit of recent history. The last time allowances and associated entitlements were reformed in this house here is how it went down. The then Leader of the Opposition, Daniel Andrews, was promised an extra half a million dollars towards his opposition leader's budget, which I think at that stage was already about \$1 million — we learned this in this chamber during the debate — and in return a deal was struck in a back room between Labor and the coalition parties. The coalition were in government at the time, and they brought in a number of changes to MPs allowances, entitlements, perks, call them what you will. That was not a very, in my view, edifying or satisfactory exercise. We learned about it as Greens, as crossbenchers, when the legislation first hit the chamber, but in fact there had been backroom conversations between the coalition and the then opposition Labor Party it seemed for quite some time.

Just to give you an example of the types of outcomes you get when that is your process, one of the allowances that was created during that round of legislation was a so-called redundancy payment for MPs who lose their seats. Unfortunately the way it was

structured was that an MP who retires during the term would get nothing but an MP who loses preselection or whose seat is abolished and who just finds themselves a way to get on a ticket somewhere gets a payment of somewhere between \$25 000 and \$75 000 depending on how long they have been an MP. So we had this preposterous situation where a Nationals MP, Paul Weller, whose seat had been abolished, simply got himself fourth on the ticket for the coalition in northern Victoria — with absolutely zero chance that he was ever going to win that seat; it was not a winnable position for the coalition — and by that device of being placed on the ticket he got paid \$75 000 simply for showing up.

That is totally the wrong set of incentives to be sending to MPs. Those who do the right thing should be entitled to a redundancy package if we are going to have such a thing, but those who simply change their behaviour and twist and turn the way they are going about it should not actually be rewarded. That is why we, the Greens, opposed that particular allowance being inserted into the bill the way it was.

There were also other new allowances that were created that were virtual slush funds. I stood here and questioned the then minister, Mr Rich-Phillips, for quite some time about a kind of open-ended expense account amount that was to be paid across to MPs with no requirement to actually prove that the money had been spent — it could have been pocketed — or what it had been spent on. So that was certainly not a step forward in terms of being able to provide some certainty and some transparency to members of the Victorian public about how MPs' perks are being dealt with.

At the federal level, for all of their problems, there is quite a bit of a transparency around it. That is how we learn what books the Attorney-General purchases for his own personal library, that is now getting bigger all the time. That is how we learn that particular members are flying here and flying there, but you will not get even that level of transparency from the Victorian Parliament. So we have got a long way to go. I am somewhat gratified that the Liberal Party is prepared to come in here and put on the notice paper a proposal for a particular reform, in particular that the regulations be amended so that members who claim a second residence allowance must have their home base — that is, their first residence — within the electorate they represent.

That is to prevent the exact device that was created here. Originally an entitlement that was there for country members who, visiting Parliament, were going to have an inner-city pad, in fact what we saw was

inner-city members deciding to get themselves a beach house — or was it a caravan; we do not know — using the same entitlement. I could have read that part of the Members Guide 15 times and I would not have seen that that sort was available, but clearly there are people who can look at every single piece of text and work out what they can squeeze out of it to their own personal benefit. So certainly we need to close that loophole.

The motion also calls for the government to amend the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 so that those claiming the second residence are disclosed. That to me seems fairly minimal; it will simply say, 'You are a claimant of the allowance'. It will not tell you any more than that, so this is a fairly minimal proposal from the coalition. Unlike the Labor Party speaker, I do not believe this is pre-emptive. I do not believe we need to wait until tomorrow to read the detailed Audit Committee report; I will take the President at his word in the letter that he circulated yesterday.

The findings of the Audit Committee I am sure have been accurately transmitted in the President's letter. In fact they define the exact problem we are facing here, in particular the fact that the member who was asked to support his claim — in this case the member for Melton — simply could not produce the evidence required to demonstrate that. The finding is — I will quote from the letter:

The location of the 'home base' appeared to have no long-term connection with the member and it is difficult to argue convincingly that he intended this to be a long-term/permanent principal residence.

The Audit Committee agreed that, viewed in terms of a reasonable person test, a position could be taken that the arrangement in this period with the member's family —

that is, his extended family —

may have been entered into to ensure that the member would continue to receive the second residence allowance. The member notified that the 'landlord'-family members did not wish to discuss the arrangements entered into with the member.

They may yet be required to.

The problem here is that I think this motion still is rather loose in terms of the loophole it seeks to close, because this question of a home base needs to be better defined. In my opinion your home base or your principal place of residence is the place that you will inevitably return to when your parliamentary duties do not take you somewhere else in the state. That is to say, you might very well be sleeping in five different motels on five nights of the week as you tour your large

electorate. It is not to do with the proportion of nights that you spend at your home base versus elsewhere; it needs to be better defined than that. Clearly if you have got a family, then you will return to them at every opportunity and that is your home base.

It is unfortunate I should say that members' families and their domestic arrangements have had to be brought into this debate inevitably as part of this discussion, but that was certainly not the choice of the Parliament of Victoria. That was a course of action the members themselves set themselves on when they chose to claim this allowance in this way. I think it was also not particularly helpful for Mr Leane to start talking about another member and their family arrangements — that member I do not believe has yet faced any kind of accusation, and there is no reason why we should be bringing that member into this discussion.

However, part 2 of the audit report is also going to review all of the members who are currently claiming the allowance, and we would expect at the end of that to have some certainty as to whether any other member around Victoria has made their domestic arrangements convenient to claiming an additional allowance, which we all seem to agree in retrospect is too easy to claim under criteria that are too loose.

As far as it goes the Liberal Party's motion sets a general direction, and I think this transparent mechanism of a parliamentary debate sends a signal to the government that indicates that they want to make some reforms in this area. Now again, unlike last time, I would rather not just read about it when a bill hits the table. I would rather not just find out about it when a particular regulation in the power of the government is changed. I have been calling from day one for the leaders of the various political parties in this Parliament to meet and discuss the broad intention to make reforms in this area. I think the reforms cannot simply just telescope in on this one particular matter. They need to look at all the various entitlements and provisions. You do not want to be doing this piece by piece for months and years into the future.

It is not simply a matter for the government to decide which changes it would like to make and then by regulation just simply drop them in and say, 'Well, there you go. That's our decision'. It should not be ministers sitting around the cabinet table deciding the scope of the reforms or what the end result will be. We need the participation of all members in this place, and my suggestion has been that the leaders of the various parties represented could get together and talk about that.

We need to go a bit further, though, than simply changing one or two entitlement provisions. It has long been the view of the Greens that we need to establish a parliamentary standards commissioner to administer the system transparently and at arms length and be able to explain to members and to the broader public, separate from the political process of this chamber and the other chamber, how the system works and how the system is intended to work.

What we have learned through this process is that members are not routinely required to provide evidence for their claims that they have established primary and secondary residences in two different parts of the state, because the two members in this case are actually scrambling around trying to produce evidence now and they have been unable to do it. The only evidence that they have provided, such as drivers licence or electoral enrolment address changes, are the very types of cosmetic changes that you would make if you were trying to defraud the system. The actual evidence that is required is that these people did consider these residences to be their home bases, that they did spend time at those locations, that they had reasons to be there that were to do with their own personal time rather than parliamentary duties that could have taken them around the state. I am not accepting to any degree, and clearly the Audit Committee in making its finding does not accept, the evidence that has been proffered so far. That is quite important because the next step needs to be that the Privileges Committee of the lower house investigates the two members.

We have heard quite a bit from the government about how they did not like the upper house asking the Ombudsman to investigate matters of allowances and entitlements in a matter separate to this one. Here is the government's opportunity. Since you control the lower house and since these are lower house members whose privileges would be examined by the lower house, show us that you can actually enforce the rules on your own members. In fact in this case we are talking about a Labor majority in the lower house investigating two Labor members — one a former Labor member it seems.

The only way to restore public confidence is in fact to show that MPs are quite capable of enforcing the rules upon themselves. What is quite important in considering the implications of the findings of the Audit Committee is whether there was a deliberate intent by the members to knowingly and wilfully claim this money incorrectly, because a wilful breach of the Members Guide and through it the code of conduct, which Mrs Peulich in her introduction referred to, potentially represents a breach of privilege. We have

had an investigation in relation to facts. It has been done fairly quickly actually. It is now the job of the Privileges Committee to take those findings and those facts and decide whether an offence has been committed against the standards of that house, and if so, what is the punishment.

In relation to some other matters relating to entitlements that have come through this place, we are still waiting years later, but on this one we have made fairly good progress in terms of time and I think the next step needs to be taken. If I steal someone's car and I get caught, the penalty has to be more than, 'Well, we'll give them back the car'. That is why in other parliaments and even in this Parliament the precedent seems to have been set that if you misuse an entitlement, you need to pay it back plus 50 per cent, as well as other sorts of sanctions that the Parliament itself or a Privileges Committee may decide to issue.

The Greens will support this motion, but I think we have laid out that we are expecting much more by way of changes from this place and I think while it is worthwhile having the discussion in the chamber about — —

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

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2016–17

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the Victorian budget papers for 2016–17. What I really want to speak about are some of the things that were not included for Greater Shepparton in that budget. We know that the electorate of Greater Shepparton has a number of needs; I outline these on a regular basis. The first of those of course is investment in rail. Only last night on the adjournment I outlined the need for some investment in rail for Tatura people.

For the Shepparton line in general there has been request put forward asking for \$750 000 in this budget to conduct a business case and to improve rail services on the Shepparton rail line. But in the meantime we also need a commitment from this government to give the people of Shepparton five return services daily. That is an additional return service daily Monday to Friday, but it is actually three additional return services on Saturdays and Sundays. Our service is extremely poor, and we have been asking for a very long time for

improvements in those rail services but getting the runaround from the minister, Jacinta Allan.

The second thing that was not included in last year's budget was a commitment to our bypass. This is another issue that has been going on for a long time. We need a commitment to stage 1 of that bypass, which is Echuca Road to the Goulburn Valley Highway. That would give us a second river crossing. Recently we have had Mooroopna, Tatura and other towns to the west completely cut off from Shepparton when there have been closures of the causeway and Watt Road, which is the only other crossing, has also been closed. We need that second river crossing desperately. Not only do we need that to start the north–south bypass, of which this would be stage 1, but we also need it to give us an east–west bypass of the city. At the moment we have B-doubles going through the middle of the shopping centre — through High Street. If we had that second river crossing, we could divert them around the town.

Another issue for us has been roads maintenance, and we need a significant investment in country roads right across Victoria. In recent contributions I have outlined a number of roads in Greater Shepparton that are well below standard and are unsafe for country users.

We also need investment in our schools. Our Better Together alliance needs to be funded by this government so that it can operate even more effectively than it is currently to ensure that we can address disadvantage among secondary school students. The schools are doing a fantastic job with this Better Together alliance, but they do need support from the government through funding for the coordination of that project. We also need maintenance money for many of our schools that we are seeing are falling behind and not being maintained by this government. Asbestos is in a number of country schools, and that needs to be addressed as well.

On the health front I have been outlining the need for radiotherapy at Goulburn Valley Health for some time. Nearly every other major centre in Victoria, and some smaller centres than Shepparton, have access to radiotherapy, but Shepparton is once again not on the agenda with this government. We need a commitment — not just a passing of the buck to the Feds. We need this state government to invest in radiotherapy at Goulburn Valley Health. The radiotherapy at the South West Regional Cancer Centre in Warrnambool was completely funded by the state, so there is no reason why the Shepparton service could not be funded as well.

We also need a commitment to stage 2 of our hospital. It needs about a further \$100 million for services such as allied health, outpatients, mental health and a number of other things, including a helipad for the helicopter to once again return to Goulburn Valley Health so that when we have emergency patients needing to be transported straight into emergency centres in Melbourne we can do it straight from Goulburn Valley Health into the hospital here at Melbourne rather than having the delay in transporting by road to the airport then transporting by air to Essendon Airport and then again by road into the city. Seconds save lives in those situations, and we need that helipad.

Crime prevention is another big one. We need investment in projects to combat ice in Greater Shepparton. It is becoming a real issue for us. We need extra police allocated to our region. Our small towns are really suffering with the regional policing that is going on because of the two-up policy of this government, which has meant that many local police stations are left unmanned and towns are left without local police while police are out patrolling other areas because they are now having to operate on a regional basis rather than a local station area basis. It is just not good enough. This government has got to start investing in country Victoria so that country Victorians can feel safe in their own town, which they do not at the moment. We have seen crime stats come out this week that have shown enormous increases in crimes in country Victoria. We need additional police.

Auditor-General: *Managing Public Sector Records*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's report *Managing Public Sector Records*. The Public Records Act 1973 sets out records management requirements for Victorian public sector agencies. This is an important data tool when used and managed properly. Not only is it capable of full transparency of our government agencies' daily business but it also creates the ability to determine future needs and requirements for the ongoing delivery of government services.

These records provide integrity and scrutiny for the system. This is a register and overview of how public records are created and for what purpose. Importantly the system incorporates demonstrated performance, transparency and accountability. There are a multitude of staffing categories that are charged with the daily responsibility of creating and managing public records — contractors, consultants, volunteers and, more commonly, public sector employees.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet oversees the Public Records Office of Victoria and is responsible for whole-of-government information management. It must report annually on its activities to the Special Minister of State. There have been many technological advances in the way public records are managed and collected. One can only imagine the increase in the sheer volume of records created and held by agencies and third-party providers. This coupled with new business practices, not to mention advances in technology, has created added risks to information integrity, accessibility, security and preservation.

Given the act was established in 1973 it would appear necessary and timely that a legislative review occur. The Victorian Auditor-General's office report states that:

... Victoria's information management environment is highly fragmented and disconnected — with multiple sets of policies and standards that can sometimes contradict each other.

Clearly this ad hoc arrangement needs attention, as there is no whole-of-government oversight of agency records management. In Victoria there are numerous agencies that are tasked with the creation and maintenance of public records, including, to name a few, the office of the Freedom of Information Commissioner, the office of the commissioner for privacy and data protection, the Crime Statistics Agency and the DataVic office in the Department of Treasury and Finance, along with the government's planned Victorian information commission. There needs to be a uniformity of standards and application.

The Auditor-General has highlighted a series of recommendations that are worthy of implementation. I support them fully, and I am confident that we in Victoria can do better. I thank the Auditor-General for this report.

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2016–17

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — I rise to make my contribution with regard to the budget papers 2016–17. I want to make some comments about the funding or the lack thereof in this budget for police and appropriate police resources.

In the previous term of government, under both the Napthine and Baillieu premierships, there were significant investments in additional police officers to ensure that our community was kept safe. Thus far under this Andrews government all we have seen is the repeal of important laws that were keeping us safe, like the move-on laws, and we have seen an absolute crime

tsunami engulfing our community. This is something that has been extremely evident across western Victoria. I know there has been a significant focus by locals in Ballarat in particular as well as in Melton and in other towns and cities in western Victoria on the impact that the lack of police in our community is having.

I note some crime statistics that came out on Thursday of last week. These statistics were quite shocking. I think it is important to detail them to the house so it can understand exactly what is happening in our community. In the local government area of the City of Ballarat, homicide and related offences are up 250 per cent; assault and related offences are up 10.31 per cent; sexual offences up 26.16 per cent; abduction and related offences up 14.29 per cent; robbery, amazingly, is up 42.86 per cent; dangerous and negligent acts endangering people, up 89.66 per cent — nearly 90 per cent; arson, up 28.26 per cent; theft up 14.36 per cent; weapons and explosive offences, up 21.57 per cent; and justice procedures are up 94.87 per cent. That represents an overall rise in offences of 7.35 per cent from December 2015 to the December 2016 figures which I was quoting.

One of the more startling statistics is that there has been a 108 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries in the suburbs of Ballarat North and Alfredton in Ballarat. Aggravated burglary is an offence that was rarely heard of in Ballarat until recent times, and to see more than a doubling of these offences in Ballarat is shocking.

The number of police in Ballarat dealing with these crimes has been nowhere near sufficient. We have had a new police station opened in Ballarat West. That was funded by the former Liberal government, you will be pleased to know, Acting President Finn. This police station was funded and built by the former government, but when it was opened by Labor, their first act was to cut its opening hours.

Mr Ramsay — Shame!

Mr MORRIS — I actually drove past the police station one Sunday, Mr Ramsay, while attending a Liberal fundraising, that I am quite sure you were also at, and there was a used mattress dumped outside the new police station. The new police station that had been just recently opened and which was supposed to be open 12 hours a day, seven days a week had already been closed by this Labor government. That is their view on crime.

I note the 26.16 per cent rise in sexual offences that has been recorded in the last year under this Labor

government. There was an article on the front page of the Ballarat *Courier* of 17 March with the headline 'Burnt out'. It details how police are at breaking point in Ballarat due to the increase in crime that they need to deal with. This is of significant concern, because all we have seen from this Labor government is the effective cutting of police numbers with regard to population growth.

It is quite obvious that when you have an increasing population, you are going to need an increase in police to deal with situations that are going to occur. But what have we seen under this government? We have seen nothing other than a cutting of police resources. It is a shameful act from this shameful government.

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2015–16

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am referring to the budget papers for 2015–16, page 99, in respect of the Murray Basin rail project. I note this budget allocates \$180 million to \$220 million total investment in this project, with expenditure due in 2015–16 of \$16 million, then \$30 million in 2015–16 and then the remaining expenditure of \$174 million. I just remind the chamber that it was actually the coalition government, through the sale of the Rural Finance Corporation, that made available the initial \$220 million for this project, and the federal government contributed an extra \$200 million for the total expected costs.

I want to bring to the attention of the chamber some problems associated with the rollout of this project and some flaws in the design features of it. As has already been discussed in this chamber by me, there was considerable concern in relation to the tracks during the summer period. A lot of the grain harvest was unable to be moved by rail. In fact a lot of it had to be moved by road, because the tracks expanded in a way that meant the train sets could not utilise the track. A lot of that was heat related, due to longer tracks that were welded rather than bolted. That created a significant curve in the track due to heat expansion, which meant that the locomotives and the carriages were unable to use the track, mainly in areas with temperatures over 30 degrees, which is most of the northern part of Victoria.

I also want to refer to other design problems associated with the basin project which have been identified by the Rail Revival Alliance and some of the issues they have highlighted to me in my role as shadow parliamentary secretary for rural and regional transport. A lot of them are about the removal of a number of sidings and

station yards and the branch line connections to Castlemaine and crossing loops. V/Line does not have sufficient understanding of freight operations any longer to make decisions about the removal of this infrastructure. The changes to Maryborough are a case in point. The number of roads made available in the proposed yard will be totally inadequate for major train movements and the necessary remaking of trains, crossing of trains and temporary storage. The implication for current or any future freight operators to keep Maryborough as a depot is dire as the hub of freight operations as it currently stands would be unlikely to continue into the future.

There are issues with the standard gauge line, which is to be moved from the platform into number 3 road, so that any train going further north will not have platform access on standard gauge at Maryborough. Thus for any tourist trains, let alone a future Mildura passenger service, Maryborough will not be a stop, and to alter this situation in the future will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The slewing of the rail away from existing platforms is planned at a number of other locations such as Avoca, St Arnaud and Donald. This will effectively end the tours conducted by various heritage rail groups to these locations. Heritage rail is an important aspect of the tourist industry along the Murray Basin rail project. There is also the removal of the current junction of the Castlemaine line at Maryborough, which will again provide a significant disincentive to reopen the Maryborough to Castlemaine line.

The number of crossing loops between Ararat and Mildura will severely restrict freight operations on the line. Eighty to 100 kilometres between loops is just too far, even with the current level of traffic. As the level of traffic increases with mineral sands traffic and increased agricultural product, rail operation will be severely limited because of the inability to allow trains travelling in the opposite direction to pass.

There are also problems associated with the installation of the dual gauge line between Maryborough and North Geelong. It is proposed that the line between Maryborough and Geelong via Ballarat will be dual gauge. One-third of the rail will be installed inside the current broad gauge track to accommodate a standard gauge train. This would allow standard gauge trains from the Murray Basin to take a shorter route to the Geelong or Melbourne wharves without the necessity of going through Ararat, thus saving over 100 kilometres in distance for the trip. The dual gauge would also mean that the current broad gauge passenger service between Maryborough and Melbourne via

Ballarat could continue uninterrupted without a change of rolling stock.

Unfortunately there are a number of disadvantages to this proposal. Passenger trains operating on dual gauge track are limited for safety considerations by V/Line to 80 kilometres an hour. I could go on and on about a whole lot of problems associated with the detail and design of the Murray Basin rail project; these are just some of a few. Even though I see money allocated in the budget, there are significant problems with the total design. V/Line has not had the experience of designing a significant project like this, and I certainly encourage Minister Jaala Pulford to work with her department to make sure some of these issues that I have identified through this report — —

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

VicForests: report 2015–16

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — This evening I would like to make a couple of comments on the VicForests annual report for 2015–16. The CEO, Robert Green, wrote in the report — —

Mr Dalidakis — Former CEO. If you knew these things, you would know he is the former CEO.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Mr Dalidakis, we have been doing very nicely until you decided to fire up. I would ask you to control yourself, please.

Ms BATH — I note that this report is the 2015–16 report and comes from the man called Robert Green, the CEO at the time. Mr Robert Green identifies that:

The 2015–16 financial year proved to be very positive on many fronts, yet challenging on others.

In terms of some of the challenges, he identifies the biodiversity management program and the Leadbeater's possum as some of the significant challenges. The report goes on to talk about the Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group, and in that section the report identifies that:

VicForests has invested considerable resources in detecting the species, creating artificial hollows for nesting, and altering our harvesting methods to enhance the species' habitat.

Now, habitat for the Leadbeater's possum, as we know, is very important, and I feel VicForests is certainly making headway in terms of its responsibility around this native animal. The report goes on to say that there have been many surveys of possums, resulting in

detection of 137 colonies during that period. The detection comes from a range of sources, including the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, which is run by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; community members; and also VicForests' preharvest surveys.

The Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group also looks at the implementation, in terms of research, of mechanically constructed hollows — nesting boxes. There has been some great success with respect to that. The report looks at hollows that have been monitored — nesting hollows that have been implemented across VicForests sites and then monitored. They have been monitored a number of times through the months to assess whether there are colonies being set up. The report goes on to say that the possums were found in 37 out of 72 artificial nesting boxes at 87 per cent of the sites. This is encouraging when we consider that VicForests is looking to encourage greater support for the implementation of nesting boxes in the future. VicForests also goes on to say that surveys will be continued through much of 2016–17. We know now that in terms of current status there are over 560 colonies identified through various methods.

On page 17 the report also looks at and supports continued implementation of recommendations made by the Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group. Interestingly enough, though, they cannot implement recommendations when the government does not forward their responsibility in terms of triggers. When a colony is identified there is a 200-metre radius protection zone put around the colony. That equates to roughly 12 hectares taken out of coupes. The recommendation from the advisory board was that when 200 colonies occurred, that would be a trigger, meaning that the government should do a full and comprehensive assessment into this strategy and this process. This trigger came in June 2016 — that is, well over eight months ago — and we are still to see the responsible government, with its minister, Ms Pulford, produce this report. It has not happened. A month ago VicForests had not seen it; it was not identified. It is not good enough, and it should be rectified.

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2016–17

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My contribution in the statements on reports debate tonight relates to the state budget 2016–17, but I want to talk particularly about the series of new property taxes that have been placed on construction and property development across this state in the last two and a bit

years, since the change of government. I hasten to add that Daniel Andrews was elected with a series of promises not to introduce taxes, charges and levies and not to increase them by more than indexation. He was caught saying this many times during the period. On 19 November 2014 David Speers asked him:

So, any higher taxes, levies?

And Daniel Andrews responded:

Absolutely not. We're not in the business of trying to solve problems —

in various places —

... higher taxation will not fix those problems.

David Speers said:

I just want to nail this list down ...

Daniel Andrews said:

The answer is a very simple one: no increases. And the question also related to new charges; I have no intention of introducing new charges.

There are many examples of this, but actually when you look at it now, there is actually a baker's dozen of new taxes that have been introduced by this government. The infrastructure contribution on new estates has been jacked up; that is number one. Planning fees charged by councils have been hugely increased, by between 100 and 1000 per cent in some cases. The axing of the longstanding Victorian off-the-plan stamp duty exemption is effectively a new tax that has been applied on those types of constructions. The growth areas infrastructure contribution has been jacked up and brought forward. In relation to the new community infrastructure charge there has been an increase that has been put on all new estates.

The land tax surcharge on foreigners was first introduced in 2015, with a further increase in 2016 — that is two taxes. The stamp duty surcharge on foreign purchasers was first introduced in 2015 and further increased in 2016 — also two taxes. A \$220 million levy was imposed on the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) over four years. The buildings component of the VMIA business is about 12 per cent, so that is a hit of about \$50.2 million on the property sector over four years. The government has flagged the introduction of a vacant property tax. The problems with policing that will be significant, but the government is committed to introducing that new tax despite their commitment not to introduce new taxes, charges or levies. The introduction of the social housing

requirement for large new projects and the expansion of inclusionary zones is the 12th new tax.

I note that this week the government put out a value capture collection framework for certain key projects, and that arguably is also a new tax that was not fully flagged before the election. Nobody saw this as a new way to scoop money out of projects. I am not saying that there ought not to be value capture — I think sensibly there can be — but this is at odds with the government's commitment about not introducing new taxes, charges and levies and not increasing or jacking up taxes, levies and charges beyond indexation. Let me be clear: the CPI has been less than 2 per cent every year that this government has been in power, yet state taxes have risen in the last two budgets — it will be interesting to see what happens in May — by 20.7 per cent. That is a huge increase in taxation in that period. Insurance taxes are up 6.3 per cent and the land tax take in 2016–17 alone is up 28.3 per cent. I make that a genuine baker's dozen of new taxes — 13 new taxes or increases in taxes that are well beyond indexation or the CPI. Councils have been told to keep their rates down, but meanwhile the government is jacking up its tax take and spending enormous amounts of money.

It is also very clear that the government is determined to keep on with this approach. They want to scoop more money in. That has a direct impact on housing affordability. All of these charges, all of these taxes, go straight to the bottom line of the cost of properties. All of them go straight on for a new, young family who wants to buy a property at the edge of the city. They are paying these taxes. With some of them, like the growth areas infrastructure contribution, it is even worse, because the tax is meant to be taken into the Treasury but then later put out as a contribution to infrastructure in the area, but \$170-odd million is being held in the Treasury now and the government will not let that money out. This is a hit on housing affordability — new taxes, charges and levies — from Daniel Andrews, Mr Tax.

Multicultural affairs: report 2014–15

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to be able to make some comments on the *Victorian Government Report in Multicultural Affairs*. The most recent one of these reports is for 2014–15, which seems a little dated but that is because there was a delay in tabling due to the coordination and synthesis of information from other annual reports. The report is intended to present a whole-of-government perspective on the state of multicultural affairs in Victoria.

I am very concerned about the state and direction of multicultural affairs in this state. I hope that this government rethinks its direction. Its decision to absorb the VMC — the Victorian Multicultural Commission —

Mr Davis — Take it over.

Mrs PEULICH — Somebody would say 'gut'. Its decision to absorb the VMC into the Department of Premier and Cabinet is a retrograde move. We are already seeing the negative effects of that and the blurring of what should be the focus of multicultural affairs with the government's broader agenda, some elements of which do not necessarily sit comfortably with one another.

I am very disappointed that when I contact — when I have cause, which is not all that often — the VMC now I get a response from an email address ending in @dpc.vic.gov.au. The VMC is a statutory authority in name only. It seems to now just be an expansion and absorption of the government's Department of Premier and Cabinet. I believe there are no dedicated staff for the purpose of the VMC's exclusive use, as there should be if it is going to be an independent statutory authority.

I am very concerned about some of the discontent in the sector. Much of it was evident and highlighted as a result of the Premier's Gala Dinner the other night, where no national anthem was played and there was not a single mention of the word 'Australia', the country that people from all parts of the world have come to. It appears that the word 'Australia' is being cleansed from the Victorian Labor lexicon. I do not know whether it is because the Labor Party is somehow ashamed of Australian values, which have been embraced as Australia is sought after as a destination by migrants from all parts of the world seeking peace and refuge, from left-wing dictatorships, from right-wing dictatorships or through their own choice for a better quality of life.

If people want more proof of where I believe the government is losing its direction in the area of multicultural affairs, they should look no further than the most recent Victorian values statement, which was released by the Premier. Having perused this document there does not appear to be a single mention of the word 'Australia' in it. We are suddenly not Australians. Indeed there seems to be a deliberate cleansing of the word 'Australia' and we now only talk about Victorian values. I would have thought that one could be a proud Victorian and a proud Australian all in the one hit. When people migrate to this great country of ours,

Australia, they do not necessarily do so with the explicit purpose of becoming just Victorians.

I am also concerned about the feedback that I am getting from the grassroots. This policy was launched on a Sunday at 9.30 in the morning, despite the government paying lip-service to its respect for faith communities, when one would have thought those who were religiously observant — say, Christians — would not be able to attend.

All the directions of this government in the area of multicultural affairs are alarming, and I believe it stems from the reforms to the VMC. I believe that now they are working hand in glove, as opposed to operating as a statutory authority. I would call on the government and the minister to rethink their position and focus on those issues that are of greatest concern to Victoria's multicultural communities, not the government's broader agenda that alienates most of those who are actually passionate about multicultural affairs and how it impacts on their lives.

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Membership

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

That Mr O'Sullivan be appointed to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the house do now adjourn.

Tatura V/Line services

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport. I have recently been contacted by an elderly constituent who lives in Tatura, a regional town about 20 kilometres west of Shepparton. In her words, since the implementation of the new V/Line timetable on the Shepparton line, Tatura has been cut off. She raised a number of valid points as evidence of this. My request of the minister is that she takes immediate action to rectify this unfair and unacceptable situation for Tatura

V/Line passengers, particularly seniors wanting to use travel vouchers for a return trip.

My constituent travels to Melbourne for medical appointments. She travels from Tatura on the 6.25 a.m. bus, which takes her to Murchison East, where she then catches the train. But to come home, if she wants to get home at a reasonable hour and she catches the 4.31 p.m. train, she has to arrange for someone to collect her from Murchison East as this service does not have a connecting bus to Tatura. It is either this or wait for the 7.08 p.m. train to Murchison East, which does have a connecting bus, but this does not arrive in Tatura until approximately 9.33 at night, which makes a very long day for elderly people travelling for medical appointments.

And yes, she can arrange for someone to pick her up from the 4.31 p.m. train when it arrives in Murchison East at 6.50 p.m., but this creates another problem for her. My constituent is eligible to use senior vouchers, and on a recent trip to and from Melbourne she wanted to use one voucher for a return trip. However, as she was departing Tatura at 6.25 a.m. and returning on the 4.31 p.m. service, which she had to depart in Murchison East, she was not able to use one voucher for the return trip as she was not returning to the same point of departure. V/Line explicitly advised her that this is their policy and she would need to use two vouchers for such a trip. This is quite unfair when the 4.31 p.m. service does not have a connection to Tatura.

A further complication for this constituent is that there is no booking agent in Tatura, as the only booking agent in Tatura was in a business that burnt down in April 2016, so there has not been a booking agent in the town for almost 12 months. My constituent advised that since there is no booking office in Tatura she has to go to either Kyabram or Shepparton to purchase tickets using her senior vouchers as some conductors will not accept her voucher when she boards and she is therefore left to pay for a ticket on the spot despite being eligible for free travel vouchers.

My constituent has also tried to book on the phone in the past, telling the phone operators that she wants to use her voucher, that there is no local office and so on. She said she has been assured each time that she will be on the travel manifesto; however, on more than one occasion this has not been the case. So here is a 71-year-old female traveller who has the unfortunate necessity of having to travel for medical appointments some 3 hours away, and rather than this being a simple process of catching an inexpensive public transport system in a straightforward way at sensible times, the

current system makes such a trip an exhausting ordeal of incomplete services, difficult departure — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take it you did pose a question at the outset?

Ms LOVELL — Yes, as I always do.

Gippsland bus services

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — My request is for the Minister for Public Transport in the other place, Ms Allan, and it relates to the regional network development plan and the way in which interconnectivity and connectivity of bus services to train and rail services throughout Gippsland was something which emerged as a key theme in the course of consultations throughout Gippsland in 2016 and the development and release of recent bus timetable improvements, not just to Central Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley in particular but also to the Warragul-Drouin area. In this regard I note that the additional services that are provided along with additional off-peak train services will allow people to get to and from their desired locations faster and will provide a greater degree of convenience and service for those who either do not have their own vehicles or who are limited by virtue of mobility or frailty and that this is an issue of ongoing importance for the changing demographic throughout Gippsland.

I would note, however, that there is a need to continuously improve the services to make sure that there is no resultant disadvantage from timetabling changes where increase to services may provide greater overall benefit but some people who may wish to get to and from work, medical appointments or school, TAFE or training may in fact suffer inconvenience as a consequence. In order to make sure that this does not occur I would ask that the minister take consideration of further improvements that can be undertaken to bus timetabling arrangements throughout the Latrobe Valley, specifically Traralgon, Traralgon East, the Moe-Newborough area and also Warragul-Drouin, and that this information be provided to the community in a way that enables them to continue to have input into the ongoing improvement of bus and related public transport services throughout Gippsland.

Mental health services

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — My adjournment is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action I am seeking is for better triaging of mental health patients in emergency departments. In 2014 the former government established a psychiatric

assessment and planning unit — a PAPU, as it is known — at the Maroondah Hospital to improve patient access and ease the demand on the emergency department (ED).

The four-bed unit provides fast access for approximately 400 patients per year to short-term specialist assessment and treatment for people experiencing acute mental illness, without requiring admission to an acute mental health inpatient bed, which we know are in very short supply. So for people with short-term mental health treatment needs such as drug-induced psychoses, medication overdoses or suicidal ideation or those in need of being assessed under the Mental Health Act 2014, the PAPU ensures faster access to appropriate care. It also helps to divert preventable admissions to acute mental health inpatient beds and generally makes the emergency department a calmer place. Importantly, as I said, this reduces demand on the emergency department by admitting people from the ED and improves patient flow through the ED by providing emergency department access beds to people who have an acute psychosis due to ice use, an overdose of prescription medication et cetera. This really is important, given the increasing instances of acute mental health presentations to emergency departments. Accordingly the action I seek of the government is that it expands this successful model across the state to reduce the increasing burden on our emergency departments.

Eureka Stadium

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Regional Development and relates to an answer to a constituency question that I received this week to a question I asked on 23 February. That question related to the Eureka Stadium development in Ballarat. I note that in the minister's response she stated that:

The City of Ballarat compulsorily acquired the North Ballarat Football Club freehold title (club rooms and sports club facility) with the intent to lease to ensure VFL and AFL football games are played at Eureka Stadium.

I believe that this statement is untrue, and if that is the case this response to this constituency question would form part of *Hansard*. Therefore I am concerned that the minister may have misled the house in this regard. The reply also goes on to say:

Council concerns regarding access were only recently raised when council were unable to work with the North Ballarat Football Club board of directors to deliver an agreeable outcome.

Likewise I find that statement very, very difficult to believe, because I have been reliably informed that concerns have been raised continuously since 2014 since this election commitment was made by the government. So the action that I seek is for the minister to consider these two aspects of her response, to clarify these statements and, if required, to provide an explanation to the house.

Wyndham City Council

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter this evening for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. This is a matter that concerns a huge number of people particularly in the Wyndham area and concerns the integrity of the election that was held in October last year for Wyndham City Council. The minister and the house would be aware that there was some considerable consternation, both public and private, regarding the activities of Cr Intaj Khan during that particular council election. As a result of the actions of Cr Khan there was the suggestion that he may have actually been trying to buy the mayoralty of the Wyndham City Council in that election and the suggestion that he was running many dozens of dummy councillors right across the ward. In fact in his own ward of Harrison some 41 council candidates were running.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr FINN — No prizes for guessing which political party he is in, Mrs Peulich. The concern from the local community is still at its peak, it has to be said, because whilst Cr Khan was elected to the council by a very, very narrow margin — not many of his running mates were — that does not alleviate the worry that people have about what happened in Wyndham last October.

My understanding is that there is an investigation being held into the Wyndham council election of last year. Given it is now getting on to the end of March my view is that there has been ample time to examine this matter in a sufficient way, and I believe that in order to provide some solace one way or the other to the local community it is time this report was released. It is about time that this report was made public. So I am asking the minister to release the report if she has received it. If she has not received the report, I ask that she urge the inspectorate to get a wriggle on with the investigation to put this matter to bed once and for all, because the integrity of that particular election in October last year for Wyndham City Council is very much in the spotlight and something that must surely concern us all.

Seymour Justice Service Centre

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — I have a very straightforward adjournment matter for the Minister for Corrections in relation to community corrections services in my electorate. The action I seek is for the minister to come with me to Seymour Justice Service Centre to have a chat to the staff about how things are going. Since coming to government the Andrews Labor government has invested \$320 million in community correctional services across the state. Part of this investment has included a significant recruitment drive, where specialist staff have been recruited and trained to manage different categories of offenders based on their risk and what is needed to help them break the cycle of reoffending. I understand that the investment has increased the number of staff to approximately 950. This is an increase of more than 300 staff over the last two years, so I am keen to have a chat to the staff and give them the opportunity to discuss their experiences directly with the minister.

The Auditor-General recently found that under the former government's management of community corrections it was riddled with higher caseloads, a lack of resources and support for staff, a lack of qualified staff and a failure to properly train them. I think it is timely, two years into this government, that staff who were working under those pressures have an opportunity to meet with the minister in relation to the important work they do.

Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, these reforms since Labor has come into power have significantly strengthened community safety in holding offenders to account for their actions. The reforms have seen offenders better supported with more intensive case management and targeted rehabilitation and support services. After all if we can break the cycle of reoffending, then we can actually reduce crime. I do hope the minister can fit us into her diary and come to talk to the staff in Seymour.

Anakie Youang heritage listing

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Honourable Natalie Hutchins. On Monday, 6 March, Geelong building materials supplier Aerolite Quarries Pty Ltd was notified that the office of Aboriginal Victoria had drafted a recommendation to the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet that a 420-hectare quarry site 3 kilometres east of Anakie continue to be listed on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register. The company has been given until 28 April to comment in response to the draft.

This draft recommendation has been put forward despite the best available advice from four eminent experts acting for the secretary to the department — including Dr Marie Hansen Fels, archaeologist David Clark, Lethbridge-based heritage advisor Nicholas Clark and Dr Andrew Sneddon of the University of Queensland — that the grounds for counting the site among the known Aboriginal places in Victoria under the place name Anakie Youang are weak.

The landscape features of interest to Aboriginal Victoria are three scoria cones which it insists are linked to a Lowan or creation story about three sisters, which would make them a place of Aboriginal heritage significance. However, as Dr Sneddon has reported, the cones fail to reach the threshold for listing on the basis of anthropological, historical, social, spiritual or contemporary significance. Local elder Trevor Edwards of Geelong has even reportedly signed a statutory declaration that he had not heard of any such story pertaining to the site until three years ago.

I am also advised that by the time VCAT granted permits for quarrying on the site on 7 January this year, the City of Greater Geelong, after seeking comment from Aboriginal Victoria, understood that there was no requirement to devise a cultural heritage management plan for the site. The latest actions of Aboriginal Victoria therefore make no sense, especially as it had agreed to not enforce a previous listing on the site on condition that the company, in return, back away from a Supreme Court application while the state government engaged Dr Sneddon to independently make his findings.

Black scoria has been quarried in Anakie for more than 80 years, and as a lightweight aggregate it is used to make swimming pool filters, fire-resistant concrete and lightweight concrete. Aerolite Quarries Pty Ltd employs 32 personnel of its own and 20 contractors onsite. Aboriginal Victoria did not take an interest in this site until nearby residents objected when the company applied to the City of Greater Geelong for development approvals in mid to late 2014. If the draft recommendation is adopted, the company will be additionally required to seek a cultural heritage permit from Aboriginal Victoria or cease all activity on the site, thereby putting both Aerolite itself and the livelihoods of at least 50 people at risk. The action I seek is that the minister review Aboriginal Victoria's approach to this matter and confirm to Parliament that the agency has in fact acted in good faith.

Public Transport Access Committee

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to Jacinta Allan in her role as Minister for Public Transport. The Public Transport Access Committee has been formed to advise Public Transport Victoria and the minister about accessibility. It has a number of members who have different types of disabilities, and they have been in place for over a year now. I think every member of that committee is fantastic, and I have been lucky enough to attend a couple of meetings. I think the tenure of the committee is up in June. I am sure the minister will, but I would ask the minister to reappoint that committee when the time is due. All the members of the committee are fantastic, as I said, so I ask the minister to reappoint them and keep that committee as formed, as it is giving us great help in our network.

Residential tenancies legislation

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and it concerns the government's proposed changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997. I am in possession of a letter from the Real Estate Institute of Victoria (REIV), the peak professional body for real estate professionals, representing more than 5000 individual members and 2000 businesses across Victoria.

They have undertaken significant research in relation to the issues of long-term leases, long-term tenancy arrangements, the government's *Heading for Home* options discussion paper and some of the significant changes that have been proposed to the tenancies act. The REIV believes that a number of the changes:

being considered will impact most heavily on those it claims to be helping — the vulnerable and disadvantaged, as landlords respond to the financial burden by leaving the sector or significantly increasing rents.

They make the point that almost three-quarters of Victorian landlords are so-called mum-and-dad property owners:

with only one property for lease. These families rely heavily on rental income to help them to meet their mortgage repayments and other living expenses.

I note the research work they have done — an options paper and a final executive summary incorporating stakeholder feedback — which lays out a number of key points:

... the majority of tenants (76 per cent) regard the current minimum notice period of 60 days as reasonable.

There is a series of other points, such as that 68 per cent rated their rental property as 'excellent' or 'good'. There are many good things about our rental system. That is not to say it is perfect and that there can never be any improvement; we should always be looking for improvements. But I am concerned that the government is embarking on this particular series of changes and doing it in a way that is not fully informed. There appears to have been no financial modelling and no impact modelling of these types of regulatory changes and these types of legislative changes which would affect the viability of property as an investment and would affect the rental relationship between landlords and tenants.

What I am seeking from the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation today is that she undertake the kind of impact study that would fully flesh out the financial and social impacts of these changes, but particularly the impact on the sector, and release that publicly. This information should be in the public domain before any changes come to the Parliament. It should be informing government decision-making, but from what I can see from the publicly available documents there has been no such analysis and no such impact study.

Western Metropolitan Region crime

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Police, the Honourable Lisa Neville. Victoria's crime statistics for the year to 31 March 2016 were released last week, and I note that drug offences are down by 10.1 per cent and security offences by 10.7 per cent in Brimbank, in my electorate. Crimes against the person are down by 0.4 per cent and property offences by 6.6 per cent in Hobsons Bay. Sexual offences are down by 21.3 per cent, drug trafficking by 39.3 per cent and manufacturing of drugs by 56 per cent in Maribyrnong. Weapons offences are down by 25.5 per cent in Wyndham. I commend the Minister for Police for her efforts in tackling crime, as evidenced in this data. It is quite clear that Victoria Police are targeting more crime, making more arrests and charging more offenders to protect communities in my electorate.

The safety of Victorian communities will only continue to improve as a result of this government's investment of a record \$2 billion in Victoria Police to recruit almost 3000 extra officers, build new police stations and expand specialist units. The 2016–17 Victorian budget further funded an extra 406 sworn officers, 52 support personnel and 30 new officers. All this is in addition to the work and commitment of this government to fix our broken family violence system

by implementing the royal commission's 227 recommendations. The action I seek is for the minister to continue supporting police in the west and continue her efforts to reduce crime, with a particular focus on continuing to provide targeted youth crime prevention grants for the west.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Could you rephrase that, please, Mr Melhem. We have a longstanding convention here that in the adjournment debate it is not permissible to ask a minister to continue to do something. In other words, if they are already doing it we do not accept that the adjournment item is to continue to do it. Obviously this is to seek an action, so can you please rephrase.

Mr MELHEM — Thank you, President. The action I seek is that the minister support police in the west in their effort to reduce crime, with a particular focus on providing targeted youth crime prevention grants for the west.

South Eastern Metropolitan Region crime

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, Lisa Neville. It is in relation to the tsunami of crime sweeping across the south-east. Indeed if you just go by the reporting of crime in the dailies, it is often committed by people who are from the south-east or it is committed in the south-east. That makes my constituents feel incredibly edgy and nervous about their safety and wellbeing. There is a lot of activity out in the community; people are really focused on this issue and want to take matters into their own hands.

One recent example was a Keysborough community safety forum where all of the issues of which we are all fully aware were raised and some concrete measures were suggested. I believe that group will be writing directly to the minister, and I may be making a representation on their behalf here. Dandenong Neighbourhood Watch is also concerned. I received a copy of a letter from the mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong to the Minister for Police saying:

At its meeting on Monday, 12 December 2016, the City of Greater Dandenong council resolved to request the state government to provide increased police resources and drug treatment services to the City of Greater Dandenong.

It goes on to explain the annual increase in crime and says:

Council requests increased local resources to address the rising problems of drug crime and addiction, including access to rehabilitation beds for ice addicts.

It goes on to explain the problems facing the City of Greater Dandenong. Mind you, they do not want drug injecting rooms. No, they actually want to help people get out of a life of crime and overcome their addiction.

The most recent statistics released comparing crime rates from December 2015 to December 2016 show a further increase — not a decrease — in crime of 5.6 per cent for the City of Greater Dandenong. In particular there was a 300 per cent increase in homicides, although the baseline is a small number. There was a 20 per cent increase in assaults, a 14.5 per cent increase in drug use, a 14 per cent increase in deception and a 63 per cent increase in dangerous and negligent acts endangering people. Many of these acts are crime related.

Clearly the south-east needs additional help and additional resources. It does not need a reduction in opening hours at police stations or the closure of police stations; it needs more resources. It needs more police on the beat and it needs tougher laws, plus it needs more rehabilitation beds for drug addicts. The City of Greater Dandenong needs assistance, and I call on the Minister for Police to provide that and respond positively to the letter from the mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong, Jim Memeti, a former student of mine.

Treasury Corporation of Victoria

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Treasurer. It relates to a number of questions I have raised in the house but to which I have received what I believe to be inadequate answers. The first question that I put to the Treasurer via the Special Minister of State was in relation to the appointment of Ms Cassandra Kelly to a Treasury Corporation of Victoria (TCV) position. She was appointed by the Treasurer in August 2015 and a few months later moved to New York, as has been reported. She now flies to attend TCV meetings on a fairly regular basis.

When I asked my initial questions in relation to the cost to the Victorian taxpayer of Ms Kelly's contribution to those meetings through flights, accommodation and other expenses I received an answer from the Treasurer via the Special Minister of State. That took a month to get. Of course I have asked further questions in relation to that issue, and I have still not had a satisfactory response from the Treasurer. I believe that he does know what the cost to the taxpayer is of allowing Ms Kelly to attend these meetings on a regular basis. I do not want any more delays, I do not want any more obfuscation, I just want to know what the cost is for

Ms Kelly's participation in all of the meetings that she has attended. The action I seek from the Treasurer is that he give an undertaking that he will provide that cost as soon as possible.

Black Rock Primary School

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and it relates to Black Rock Primary School, one of the excellent schools in my electorate, which I know well. It has a terrific reputation and is particularly inclusive and great at responding to the needs of kids of various and different abilities. As such, it has a terrific local reputation along those lines.

Like many schools in that area Black Rock Primary School has a problem with its school oval. The local soil is very sandy. Grass suffers as a consequence. It is dusty in summer; it is muddy in winter. I was at the school last weekend and saw what the school oval looks like at the moment. It is literally a dust bowl and is in need of attention. The school has a plan to do this. They have developed a plan for a fully refurbished playing surface with facilities and surrounds for the school, which can also be made available to community sporting groups after hours and on the weekend. What they plan is a synthetic playing surface that is surrounded by trees and grassed areas to give the maximum utility for the school and community and sporting groups. Their belief is that due to its greater utility a synthetic playing surface will also be self-funding over time, whereas a grass surface will require additional ongoing funding to maintain it.

I understand that this is supported by Bayside City Council, which has long argued that there are not sufficient sporting grounds and facilities for community sport in the area and, as a consequence, there are many children who miss out on playing sport and many clubs which are forced to restrict their team numbers, which is a great shame.

As I understand it, there has been an application made to the Victorian government's Shared Facilities Fund, which is geared towards delivering integrated community facilities on school sites. I cannot stress enough how important the oval is to this school. It is the main play area for the school. It is used very much by the local community, and it is used for the school's annual Big Fun Fair in spring, which I have attended in previous years. I speak in strong support of the school's application for funding under the Shared Facilities Fund. The state of the oval is dire, and it is important that it is repaired for the sake of children in the school who need play space and who should be encouraged to

exercise. It is equally important for the local community. Therefore the action that I am seeking is for Black Rock Primary School to be allocated funding under the Shared Facilities Fund.

Officer precinct gaming venue

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter on the adjournment for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Ms Kairouz. It follows representations I have received from constituents in Officer. My constituents have recently become aware of a proposal for a hotel gaming venue to be located within the Officer area. I understand it is on the Princes Highway. My constituents are concerned about the location of the proposed gaming venue and its proximity to a nearby school and a nearby childcare centre and not far from a proposed retail shopping precinct.

Advice from the council to my constituents states that gateway sites and highway precincts were identified as appropriate locations for potential gaming venues while retail strips were excluded to minimise the opportunity for convenience gambling. As I say, my constituents are concerned about this potential location. It raises the question about whether, moving forward, highway precincts and gateway sites continue to be appropriate locations for new gaming venues.

The action I seek from the minister is that she and her department examine whether gateway sites and highway precincts continue to be appropriate venues or locations for potential new gaming venues. While the precinct structure plan (PSP) process does invite public consultation, I think it is fair to say that many members of the community perhaps do not appreciate the detail that is involved in the PSPs. Perhaps there is an opportunity for further communication with the community when it comes to new gaming venues so that members of the community, as in this situation, are not caught unawares by an application such as this with limited capacity to appeal or for that new facility to be challenged. The action I seek from the minister is that she review whether gateway sites and highway precincts continue to be appropriate locations for new gaming venues.

Responses

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I have adjournment matters tonight from Ms Lovell to the Minister for Public Transport in relation to the Tatura V/Line service for passengers; from Ms Shing to the Minister for Public Transport in relation to rail and bus interconnectivity

within Gippsland and Latrobe Valley; from Ms Patten to the Minister for Mental Health regarding better triaging of patients in emergency departments; from Mr Morris to the Minister for Regional Development in relation to constituency questions that he has previously raised in relation to Eureka Stadium; from Mr Finn to the Minister for Local Government regarding Wyndham city councillor Intaj Khan; from Ms Symes to the Minister for Corrections asking the minister to join with her and attend a facility in Seymour to meet with the staff and community; from Mr Ramsay to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs regarding agency dealings with a constituent; from Mr Leane to the Minister for Public Transport regarding members of a committee; from Mr Davis to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation regarding the impact study on changes to proposed legislation; from Mr Melhem to the Minister for Police in relation to support for police in the west to reduce crime by providing targeted youth crime prevention grants; from Mrs Peulich to the Minister for Police to provide more assistance to the City of Greater Dandenong; from Ms Crozier to the Treasurer to provide the cost of participation for Ms Kelly in meetings; from Ms Fitzherbert to the Minister for Education in relation to Black Rock Primary School seeking support for a new synthetic playing surface; and from Mr O'Donohue to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in relation to the location of proposed gaming venues in his electorate.

Further to that, I have a written response to an adjournment debate matter raised by Mr Morris on 21 February.

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

House adjourned 6.12 p.m.

